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**Methuen's Modern Classics**

**IN THE STEPS OF  
THE MASTER**



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EDITED BY E. V. RIEU and PETER WAIT

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# IN THE STEPS OF THE MASTER

*by*

H. V. MORTON



METHUEN & CO. LTD. LONDON

*36 Essex Street, Strand, W.C. 2*

*Originally published in October 1934*  
*Reprinted nine times*  
*This abridged edition first published in 1941*

**PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN**

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

THE PURPOSE of this series is to reproduce some of the best contemporary and recent literature in a form and at a price suitable for educational purposes. In the present case, the length of Mr. H. V Morton's masterpiece has made some abridgement necessary, but this has been achieved without damage to the unity of the book and without any alteration of the text in the passages selected.

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E. V. R.





## CHAPTER ONE

*Describes a journey to the Holy Land and an impression of Jerusalem. I visit the Holy Sepulchre, the Mount of Olives, and the Wailing Wall.*

### § 1

AS THE sun goes down, a stillness falls over Egypt. Water channels that cross the fields turn to the colour of blood, then to bright yellow that fades into silver. The palm trees might be cut from black paper and pasted against the incandescence of the sky. Brown hawks that hang all day above the sugar-cane and the growing wheat are seen no more and, one by one, the stars burn over the sandhills and lie caught in the stiff fronds of the date palms.

It is this moment which remains for ever as a memory of Egypt, a moment when day is over and night has not yet unfolded her wings, a strange between-time in whose tremendous hush the earth seems listening for a message from the sky. The fierce day dies and the sand loses its heat and all things are for a brief space without shadow.

During this hush I stepped into a little boat on the Suez Canal. The water that fell from the oars was red, but before we had crossed the narrow canal to El Kantara it was silver, and the moon was shining. The little station was silent and deserted among the sandhills. Moonlight silvered the rails that ran north across the Sinai Desert into Palestine, and all around was a green stillness stretching out into far spaces under the stars. Kantara means 'bridge' in Arabic. Long before man left any record of his wanderings, it was the crossing place between Egypt and Palestine, a sandy strip over which the caravans could pass dry-shod between Lake Menzaleh and Lake Timsah. Joseph passed this way when he was carried into Egypt. It was the way the Holy Family fled from the wrath of Herod.

The minutes slipped into hours as I waited for the train



to Jerusalem. But I liked waiting there, listening to the queer sounds of the night, the distant barking of dogs in the desert, the harsh grumbling of camels crouched in the moonlight of the station yard. The seven days at sea were all forgotten now. It seemed that in some magic way I had been carried straight from the coldness of an English February into this strange green light on the desert's edge. It was wonderful to be standing at El Kantara waiting for the train to Judæa, and I thought that when this feeling of surprise is no longer possible the time has come to give up wandering.

The train, when it arrived, lay for a long time in the station, as if working up enough courage for its nightly plunge into the sand. Then it slipped away from El Kantara and went out into the moonlight.

Once, moving high on an embankment and outlined against the sky, I saw a file of burdened camels plodding slowly into the dawn. And I knew that in this brief flash, before the train went past, I had seen the spirit of this road: for the railway to Jerusalem, which was made by Allenby's troops during the War, follows an ancient route. It runs over the ageless caravan road to and from Egypt, and it was along this road that Joseph was led into captivity. It was the road over which the first great Jewish financier, Solomon, sent his sandalwood and his spices to the markets at Memphis. It was a road that led everywhere: to Damascus in the north, to the desert city of Petra in the east, to Egypt in the south.

On the same embankment I saw some Arabs muffled and shrouded in the cold air. First came a donkey with a woman and a child upon its back and behind them strode a man. And I remembered again that this was the way Joseph and Mary fled with a Child into Egypt.

We came to a station where I read, with a thrill of interest, the word 'Gaza'. And now, as we went onward, I saw a gathering tumult in the east. A white, palpitating light was filling the sky. It was like something approaching at great

speed, a mighty army with its chariots and its horsemen. Swords of light thrust their way upward, catching stray clouds and turning them to banners of pink and gold. Then, like an orange flung into the air, the sun leapt up, fully armed, into the sky; it was warm, and the dead earth was instantly, vividly, and rather violently, alive. Donkeys standing in stony fields stretched forth their necks and bared their teeth in salute to the new day, cocks mounted on the roofs of mud houses crowed their welcome, women with brown faces and bare feet crouched over little fires, children, their smooth little chests bare in the sunlight, stood in the shadows of the olive trees, and from villages hedged about with prickly pear the shepherds led their flocks to pasture.

A few miles to the left I saw a blinding glare of sandhills topped by a blue line of sea. I stood up and craned my neck, but I could see nothing, although I knew that somewhere in those hills lay all that is left of Ascalon. 'Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Ascalon.' 'There is a sound of trade, a clinking of shekels, about the city's very name,' said George Adam Smith, and no doubt the streets of Ascalon were dark bazaars in which the merest whisper became a fact.

And as I looked towards the now barren sandhills of Ascalon, where no whisper is handed on to-day but that of the wind blowing from the sea, something of the sadness of this country came to me, the sadness of a land that has known too much and is not permitted to forget the things that happened long ago.

We stopped at Lydda, where St. George, who presides over the destiny of England, Portugal and Aragon, was buried after his martyrdom in the year 303. Then one half of the train went on to Jaffa and the other half went for a little while to the south before, turning eastward, it climbed into the mountains of Judæa.

The train climbs so slowly that Arab boys run beside it, holding bunches of red anemones which they offer to the

passengers. The mountains are scorched and brown. The roads are white ribbons that slip in and out of the hills. Camels, absurdly large, draw diminutive ploughs sullenly and, it seems, reluctantly, over the meagre fields. Families who might be on a journey from Deuteronomy to the Book of Kings walk behind laden donkeys; here and there a fine old patriarch, who reminds one of Abraham, leans on his staff to watch the daily train go past.

As the train climbs and winds into the hills towards the mountain capital of Jerusalem, you are aware of something fierce and cruel in the air. You have the same feeling in Spain when the train crosses the Sierra de Guadarrama towards the mountain capital of Madrid. But Judæa is fiercer than anything in Europe. It is a striped, tigerish country, crouched in the sun, tense with a terrific vitality and sullen and dispassionate with age.

The fierceness of the parched gullies, the harshness of the barren hill-tops, the passion of the caked earth where lizards dart and flash, and the burning cruelty of waterless valleys, are concentrated and made visible upon the highest of the hills. And the name of this materialisation is Jerusalem.

The train came wearily to rest. I stepped out on a platform that bore the word 'Jerusalem' in three languages: English, Arabic and Hebrew. Article 23 of the Mandate for Palestine decrees that 'English, Arabic and Hebrew shall be the official languages of Palestine. Any statement or inscription in Arabic on stamps or money in Palestine shall be repeated in Hebrew, and any statement or inscription in Hebrew shall be repeated in Arabic.'

As soon as you go out of the station you notice that signposts, proclamations, motor signals and such-like are trilingual, and you realise that history is repeating itself in the strangest way. In the imperial archives of ancient Rome there must have been a clause very like Article 23 of our Palestine Mandate. In the time of Christ the three official languages were Latin, Greek and Hebrew. And as you go into Jerusalem, glancing at the trilingualism everywhere, the words of St. John come into the mind:

'And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews. This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin.'

## § 2

I went to an hotel not far from the Jaffa Gate where an Arab, who was dressed like a Turk in a musical comedy, carried up my bags. An Armenian registered me. A German chambermaid unlocked my bedroom door.

It was an attractive room with a writing-table and a good light over the bed, and it had a little balcony overlooking a narrow street and the walls of a convent school. Through the windows I could see the nuns moving about a large, bare dormitory, making two rows of little beds.

I went straight out to find my way to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. I had been studying a street plan of Jerusalem for weeks, and wondered whether I could find my way alone through the twisting lanes of the old city. As soon as I appeared in the Jaffa Road I was surrounded by eager, whispering men, wearing European suits and the red tarbush which used to be the sign of Turkish citizenship.

'You come with me to the Holy Sepulchre!' they whispered. 'I show you everything!'

There seemed to me to be a definite blasphemy in their invitations, so I shook them off and went on alone. They followed me like figures in a nightmare, whispering, and once even daring to pull me by the sleeve. I had to make it very clear that I disliked them before they disappeared from sight. I was distressed to find that the real Jerusalem, full of donkeys and camels and men selling oranges, was very different from the clear street plan that I knew by heart! I came to the Jaffa Gate and saw a great sweep of the city wall running to the south. I passed in and entered the old city. I saw to my right the huge, square tower,

known as David's Tower, which is in reality all that is left of Herod's great tower, Phasaël. I saw it with the emotion which any relic of the time of Christ must inspire, whether the observer be a devout Christian or merely a devout historian. Those huge yellow stones at the base of the tower existed in the Jerusalem of the Crucifixion. Perhaps His eyes saw them.

Round this tower and near the Gate surged an extraordinary crowd, which seemed to me, so newly from the West, to be a perfect microcosm of the East, and I looked at it with the delight of a child at a Christmas circus.

I could distinguish peasants from the villages, the *fellahin*, born farmers and ploughmen, who are a queer mixture of cunning, simplicity and violence. I remembered a story someone once told me about the Palestinian *fellah*. It was that God, at the making of the world, sent out His angel with the gift of Intellect, and gave to each man his share. There were no complaints. He then sent out the angel with the gift of Fortune. And every man grumbled. He followed this with the world's allowance of Stupidity, and the angel, carrying this gigantic burden, encountered the *fellah*, to whom he had already given his dole of intellect and fortune.

'O angel,' said the *fellah*, 'what is it you bring this time?'

'O *fellah*, it is Stupidity!' said the angel.

'O angel,' cried the *fellah*, assuming an avaricious expression, 'give me the lot, because I am a poor man with a large family!'

So the angel gave him the world's stupidity.

It is an unkind story, but I feel that it could not have been composed about anyone who was not, in spite of everything, rather decent. I am sure that there must have been a proportion of Simplicity mixed with the angel's burden.

Then, quite distinct from the *fellah*, was the Bedouin Arab. Although he walked in rags, he moved like a king of the earth. He despises the *fellah* and his spade. The Bedouin is a man of ancestry and freedom, of flocks and herds, and

tents which he calls 'houses of hair'. In him Abraham lives on into the modern world.

In spite of all my maps and plans I confessed myself hopelessly lost in this bright chaos, but I walked on with resolution, knowing that if I appeared to hesitate for one instant a pack of guides would be on my heels. But it was not a pleasant feeling because, when I had left the crowd behind, I found myself in dark, narrow lanes faced with scabrous walls, broken only by dark openings to cellars or to dank little courtyards into which cats darted with the speed and terror of wild animals. The thought crossed my mind that anyone who ventures alone into these lanes without a knowledge of Arabic deserves a knife in the back. But, miraculously it seemed to me, I came to a cross-road where donkeys were plodding along with sacks of wheat for the grindstone. I looked up and read on a blue plate let into the wall, *Via Dolorosa*.

'If I follow this,' I thought, 'it is bound to lead me to Calvary, which is inside the Holy Sepulchre.'

And no sooner had I thought it than I felt ashamed of my thought. I had blundered on the Way of the Cross and I had treated it as if it were any ordinary street. I felt ill at ease. I set this down because it is so typical of one's first thoughts in Jerusalem. The mind, accustomed to the divine Christ of Western churches, encounters in Jerusalem the memory of Jesus the Man, the Jesus who ate and slept and became weary, who drove the hucksters from the Temple, who drank the cup of death on Golgotha. At home one always thinks of Jesus in heaven, on the right hand of God the Father, but in Jerusalem one thinks of Him walking the dusty white roads, and one's intelligence is perpetually rejecting or accepting certain places that tradition associates with His manhood. As God, He is everywhere, but in Jerusalem centuries of piety have competed to place His footsteps on this stone and that road. It was almost with a shock that I realised that the *Via Dolorosa* could be a real road with men and women and animals upon it.

I do not know for certain whether the *Via Dolorosa* is really the road on which Jesus carried the Cross, and neither, I think, does anyone else. Its route depends on the situation of Pilate's judgment hall and the unknown position of the Gate Genath. But it does not seem to me to matter very much whether it is the actual road or a memorial to the actual road. What is important is that men and women who have walked upon it have met there the vision of Christ.

The *Via Dolorosa* led to a gate in a wall. On the other side was a large courtyard steeped in the morning sun. It was quiet and peaceful after the crowded lanes outside. At the far end rose up the fine façade of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which is to-day almost as the Crusaders left it. A stone seat runs along one side of the courtyard. I sat there for a moment and watched the people going in and coming out of the church.

In the middle of the courtyard was a little stall hung with rosaries and brightly coloured pictures of the life of Christ. A Copt in a blue robe bought many of these, which he carefully handed round to his family: a woman in black, two small, brown boys, a little girl, and an infant of about three, who looked wonderingly at the pictures and dropped them on the pavement.

The strangest people went into the gloom of the church and came from it into the sharp sunshine of the courtyard. There were many monks wearing white habits and khaki sun hats. There were Arab women. There were incongruous parties from cruising steamers, shepherded by hustling, irreverent guides, and there were several old shepherds in sheepskin jackets and patched-up rags, who reverently removed their slippers in the courtyard and walked into the church barefoot. This was strange. The Jews used to go barefoot into Solomon's Temple and the Moslems remove their slippers in the mosque, and here were native Christians observing the same custom.

On the pavement just outside the door of the Holy Sepulchre is the gravestone of an Englishman, Philip

d'Aubigny, who was one of the *nobiles homines* mentioned in the Magna Charta as a member of the council whose advice was taken by King John. Afterwards d'Aubigny became tutor of King Henry III and Governor of the Channel Isles. There is, I believe, an Act of Assize in existence in Jersey signed by him with the same coat of arms—four fusils in fess—as that on the gravestone in the courtyard of the Holy Sepulchre. It seems that this English knight came to the Holy Land in the train of the excommunicated Emperor Frederick II in 1229, and saw what must have been one of the most remarkable sights in the history of Jerusalem. Frederick II captured the city without striking a blow and, marching into the Holy Sepulchre, took the crown from the altar and placed it on his head with the remark, 'I said I would come; and here I am.'

D'Aubigny died in Jerusalem in 1236, and his grave has been preserved by the lucky accident that for years the divan of the Moslem gatekeepers was set over his gravestone.

I thought that d'Aubigny's grave and the two young British police in blue uniforms who stood a few yards from it were extraordinarily eloquent of the strange fortunes of Jerusalem.

I noticed that just inside the porch of the church, to the left hand as you go in, was a wooden divan spread with carpets and cushions. On this reclined a calm, aristocratic-looking man with a neatly-trimmed beard, a turban, and a long back robe. He was one of the Moslem doorkeepers to whose family the task of locking up the Holy Sepulchre had been entrusted by Saladin.

The Tomb of Jesus Christ is a small cell lined with marble, six and a half feet long, and six feet wide. Only two or, at the most, three people can enter at one time. On the right hand is a cracked slab of white marble, three feet in height, covering the rock on which He was placed after the Crucifixion.

From the marble roof of this tiny cell hang lamps which belong in various proportions to the Greek, Latin, Armenian and Coptic Churches. The Roman Catholics are known



in Palestine as the Latins. Standing at the head of the marble slab was an impressive Greek monk with a soft, spade-shaped black beard. He wore a black cassock and a high, black, rimless hat, beneath which his hair was pinned at the back in a round bun. He held a bunch of candles in his hand and, as the pilgrims entered, gave one to them, which they lit from others burning in the tomb.

I could see a pilgrim kneeling at the sepulchre, so I waited in the small, dark ante-chamber outside.

Becoming impatient, I bent down and, peeping through the low entrance, saw that the man inside was an old, bent peasant in ragged clothes, his feet in a pair of huge shoes made of felt. He was a Bulgarian who had come over in a pilgrim ship, as the Russians used to come, and he had probably been saving up all his life for that moment.

He was kneeling at the marble slab and kissing it repeatedly, while tears ran down the deep wrinkles of his face and fell on the stone. His large, rough hands, the nails split and black with labour, touched the marble gently with a smoothing motion; then he would clasp them in prayer and cross himself.

He prayed aloud in a trembling voice, but I could not understand what he was saying. Then, taking from his pocket various pieces of dirty paper and a length of ribbon, he rubbed them gently on the Tomb and put them back in his pocket.

I thought there might perhaps be room for me, so I bent my head and entered the Sepulchre. The Greek monk, the kneeling peasant and myself quite filled the small space. And it would have been all right if the old man had continued to kneel, but, disturbed perhaps by my entrance, he rose up, the tears still falling, and whispered something to me. We were now standing, our chests touching, and, looking into his eyes, I realised that I was looking at real happiness.

This was his life's dream. I had never seen such happiness before. Never in all my life have I beheld peace and contentment written so clearly on a human face. I would

have given the world to have been able to speak to him, but we stood there in the Tomb of Christ, he whispering something to me which I did not understand, and I shaking my head.

He then turned from me towards the Greek monk and said the same thing to him. But the monk could not understand, and he also shook his head. The old man became frantic with anxiety. He raised his voice slightly and then, casting a swift glance towards the marble slab, lowered it, and pointed to his forehead and to the lamps that hang over Christ's Tomb. Then the monk understood. Nodding gravely, he lowered one of the lamps on a chain and taking a piece of cotton wool, he dipped it lightly in the oil of the lamp, and with this made the sign of the Cross upon the peasant's face.

The old man sank down on his knees and turned again to the Tomb, unwilling to leave, incoherent with faith and devotion, his big, scarred hands touching the marble lovingly as if stroking the hair of a child. Presently he backed out of the candle-light into the dim Chapel of the Angel.

### § 3

As I went on through the old city, I was conscious of a feeling of imprisonment. All the dark little lanes, the high, blank walls, and the jumbled buildings erected to the glory of God, are bound tightly together by a high city wall. The wall of Jerusalem, her armour and shield in time of trouble, still exerts a powerful influence on the mind and you are subconsciously aware of it every minute of the day. You are either inside the wall, acutely aware of its encircling embrace, or you are outside it, looking back at it, thinking that it clasps the city in its brown stone arms as if trying to shield it from the modern world.

I came by way of narrow street and blank wall, by sunlight and by shadow, to the ancient Gate of St. Stephen. I saw, framed in the graceful Saracenic arch of its stones,

a brilliant little picture of the world beyond the wall. I sighed with relief at the sight of so much air and openness, so much sky, and mountains with the sun over them. And the hill-side that rose up opposite was the Mount of Olives.

All my life I have had a picture of the Mount of Olives in my mind, a picture composed by my own imagination and influenced by illustrations in books and by canvases in art galleries; but it was a very different picture from the reality. I had always thought of the Mount of Olives as an improbable hill, perhaps something like a Kentish hop field on a Derbyshire moor, with plenty of tall cypress trees among belts of woodland and little gardens with wells and fountains in them. But the real Mount of Olives is a bare ridge sloping up from the stricken-looking Kedron Valley; a ridge of rock on which the sun beats down all day long. There are white tracks twisting here and there among the rocks, and a few ploughed fields terraced in the rock and upheld on the hill by breast-high walls of limestone. In these fields are a few stumpy olive trees.

In any other place the Mount of Olives would seem bare and inhospitable, but, in contrast to Jerusalem and the mountains by which it is surrounded, it is peaceful and gracious; the only place in which to-day, as in the time of our Lord, you could go to sit under a tree and forget the nervous tension of the city.

Low down, just where the Jericho Road sends a branch road right up over the crest of the Mount of Olives, is a small patch of trees within a wall. I looked at it with the emotion it must always inspire. It was the Garden of Gethsemane.

When I came out of St. Stephen's Gate, I saw that the whole length of the eastern wall of Jerusalem overhangs a rocky gorge. The sloping ground outside the wall is covered with countless thousands of Moslem tombs; opposite on the slopes of the Mount of Olives are the Jewish tombs. Their white stones shine like bones. Both Jews and Moslems believe that the Last Judgment will be held in the arid Valley of the Kedron, between Jerusalem and the Mount

of Olives. As I looked at the tombs, and then at the grim city wall, it seemed to me that Jerusalem, so cruel in appearance, so uncompromising, had, like an ogre, devoured these thousands of dead and had cast their bones over the ramparts to rot and bleach in the sun.

The road leads down into the Kedron Valley. It is white and dusty and low stone walls hem it in. It runs straight through the valley and down to Jericho and the Dead Sea. But the branch road to the left leads over the Mount of Olives to Bethphage and Bethany. And this is the road I walked, with the sun beating on it and the heat quivering like white fire on the rocks.

I looked back from the depths of the Kedron Valley, but I could see only the tawny wall of Jerusalem towering above me on its rocky platform. As I began to climb the Mount of Olives, first a minaret, then a dome or two, appeared above the wall. Near the top of the Mount the whole city lay before me, slightly tilted in the direction of the Mount of Olives like an immense relief map that was slowly sliding into the abyss of the valley.

My first thought was amazement that Jerusalem should ever have been built. A more unlikely place for a famous city cannot be imagined. The arid mountains lie about it, rolling in long brown ridges against the sky, and in the valley below is only one spring of water—the Fountain of the Virgin. Jerusalem's water comes to-day, as it did in Old Testament times, from Solomon's Pools near Hebron. Water is also pumped from Ain Fara, the traditional 'still waters' of the twenty-third Psalm. To-day, as in olden times, every drop of rain that falls on this high mountain ridge is saved in deep rock cisterns. There is a splendid defiance about the situation of Jerusalem, or perhaps it would be more correct to say that no people who did not believe themselves to be in the special care of God would have dared to have built a city in defiance of all the laws of prudence.

And my second thought was that never had I seen a more

intolerant-looking city. All the hardness of the rock and the smouldering fires within the rock seemed to have boiled up out of the bowels of the earth and cooled into the city of Jerusalem. It was a perfect expression, so it seemed to me, of the cruelty and the fierceness of the Judæan highlands. This high city, perched above ravines and lying among the débris of centuries, might, it seemed, be the abode not of men and women and children, but the dwelling-place of ruthless emotions such as Pride and Arrogance and Hate. And as I sat for a long while looking down on Jerusalem, I thought to myself: 'That is undoubtedly the place that crucified Jesus Christ.' Like an echo to my thought came a terrible reply: 'And it would probably do so again.'

The longer I looked at Jerusalem, the more I felt convinced that my first impression was not over-drawn or extravagant. If Jerusalem has not been born out of volcanic lava, she has at least been born from the fire of men's minds. Splendid and terrible things have happened behind her walls. The modern world was born in their shadow. Strange that the greatest event in the history of Mankind should have occurred on this bare plateau; stranger still, perhaps, that Jerusalem should still wear her historic air of intolerance. I seemed to hear a Voice in the pulse of the heat, and the Voice said:

'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!'

The words beat against my brain like an echo of the heat that quivered above the Mount of Olives. I listened again, but there was no sound but the thrusting of a plough through the dry soil and the click of a mule's hoof against a flint.

Climbing to the top of the hill I mounted to a dome near the Chapel of the Ascension, which now belongs to the

Moslems. On the paved space round the dome an elderly little guide, wearing sun spectacles, a European suit and a scarlet tarbush, was explaining Jerusalem to a crowd of English tourists, pointing here and there with an unrolled umbrella. I noticed that he talked to them about Jesus Christ as if he were a missionary explaining the rudimentary facts of Christianity to a crowd of rather feeble-minded Patagonians.

'You remember, please,' he said, 'that our Lord ascended into heaven.'

Two or three of the tourists, who appeared to be worn-out with Scripture, turned away, while an elderly man, exactly like the caricature of a colonel in *Punch*, cleared his throat in an embarrassed way, as if it were not quite good form to mention such things in public.

'Well, please,' continued the little guide, pointing with his umbrella, 'the site of the Ascension is just there by the little round building, which we can enter in a moment. You will remember, please, that it was here that our Lord said good-bye to His disciples.'

The group nodded. The little guide's high voice ploughed on through his deliberate recital:

'And He said, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."'

There was silence for a few seconds. I like to think that all those people, who were touring Jerusalem as they would tour Cairo or Athens, felt, as I did, that a ridiculous situation had been lifted by these lovely, shining words into another world. 'And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.' Even the little guide's high voice with its odd accent could not hurt these words. It seemed to me that something supremely beautiful had shone for a moment on all of us, and had gone. Then the colonel cleared his throat and asked his wife if she had remembered his sun glasses.

When they had gone and I was alone on the roof, I turned my back on Jerusalem and, looking to the east, saw something I shall never forget.

The Mount of Olives is slightly higher than Jerusalem, and stands up therefore like a screen between the city and the desert land that falls to the Dead Sea.

Jerusalem is 2,500 feet above sea level; the Dead Sea is 1,290 feet below sea level. So that in the course of about twenty-five miles the land falls nearly 4,000 feet into the hot, tropical world of the Jordan Valley. While it is frosty at night on the Jerusalem hills, it is hot and stuffy twenty-five miles away in Jericho, for the Jordan Valley is a phenomenal crack in the earth's surface which is filled with fierce heat all the year round.

From the top of the Mount of Olives the view into this tropical trench looked like a photograph of the mountains of the moon. I gazed down into an apparently sterile world, a world of brown, domed hills piled together, bare of vegetation, and falling rapidly into the hot distance where a streak of blue marked the waters of the Dead Sea. Beyond the blueness rose a barrier of brown hills streaked with violet shadows. They were the Mountains of Moab.

This was a view that Jesus knew well, and it has not altered since His eyes gazed upon it. He saw it when He came over the hill from Bethany or Bethphage and, no doubt, He turned, as every traveller turns, to look once more upon its superb indifference before, breasting the ridge, the view was hidden and Jerusalem came into sight.

How could Jerusalem fail to be the Holy City with this terrifying breeding-place of prophets before its eyes? The Golden Age of Israel was in the desert, when God took His people by the hand and led them safely into the Promised Land. It is this breath from the pure, sterilised desert that blows through the denunciation of Elijah and, in fact, through the denunciations by all those holy men who tried to lead Israel away from foreign cults and luxuries back to the old austerity. And I wondered, as I looked down on the silent, dead hills, whether Jesus loved to sleep in Bethany

because, after the wrangling in the Temple court, He could catch a glimpse, as He crossed the Mount of Olives on His way back in the evening, of the calm 'desert place' dedicated for ever to God.

I came down from the Mount of Olives. The noonday sun burned above Jerusalem. I saw the city lying compactly within its wall, modern Jerusalem scattered round it in clumps of white stone buildings. And the colour of old Jerusalem is the colour of a lion-skin. There are tawny yellows and dark browns and pale golds. It must have looked very like this when Jesus saw it in the time of Herod Antipas: a city like a lion crouched in the sun, watchful, vindictive, and ready to kill.

#### § 4

A young Zionist called on me one day, and gave me an armful of propagandist literature. In retaliation, I pressed him to take me to the Wailing Wall, which he did with some reluctance, because the politically-minded young Zionists have little in common with the Orthodox Jews who wail, with renewed vigour on Fridays, for the departed glories of Israel.

We found our way to the Wailing Wall down narrow winding lanes in the old city. Turning a corner suddenly, we came upon an enormous tawny stretch of wall from whose cracks grow tufts of grass and wild caper plants. The wall is about fifty yards long and sixty feet high, and the lower courses are of enormous blocks of brownish stone—one of sixteen and a half feet long and thirteen feet wide. This is believed to be the only fragment of the Temple wall which the soldiers of Titus did not destroy after the siege.

The Jews who wail here are, in theory, mourning for the departed splendour of Israel. This may seem rather strange to those who know that there is a Jewish National Home in Palestine sponsored by Great Britain, to which thousands of Jews from all over the world have emigrated. But the Jew who wails at the Wailing Wall is not a modern Jew, or



Zionist; in fact, he deplotes the material character of modern Zionism. He is an old-fashioned, Orthodox Jew, whose life is bound up with his religion.

The custom of wailing, or mourning, is one that occurs frequently in the Old Testament.

'Therefore I will wail and howl,' cried Micah the Morasthite. 'I will go stripped and naked: I will make a wailing like the dragons and mourning as the owls.'

'We grope for the wall like the blind,' says Isaiah, 'and we grope as if we had no eyes: we stumble at noonday as in the night; we are in desolate places as dead men. We roar all like bears, and mourn sore like doves. . . .'

The custom of wailing at the wall of Herod's Temple goes back to remote times. After the destruction of Jerusalem, Hadrian forbade Jews even to come within sight of the city, on pain of death. Under Constantine, however, they were allowed to weep on the site of the Temple once a year. In the twelfth century the exterior wall—the present Wailing Wall—was allotted to the Jews as a place for prayer.

About fifty Jews, men and women, were standing against the wall, some with books, and all of them muttering swiftly as they rocked their bodies to and fro, as Jews always do when they pray. Round the corner is a police box, where a British policeman is on duty to prevent trouble, for the Wailing Wall is one of the danger spots of Jerusalem.

'Oh, anything may happen here,' said the policeman. 'A Jew may have a row with an Arab, or an Arab may insult a Jew, and before you know where you are, there's a riot. I'm on the telephone, and there's a police station round the corner. Excuse me. . . . You can't use that camera, madam.'

'But why ever not?' asked an Englishwoman.

'It isn't allowed. They don't like it.'

I admired the way this policeman handled the most tender spot in Jerusalem—for the wall is Moslem property, and on the other side of it rises the great Dome of the Rock and the Mosque of el Aksar, which occupy the site of the

Temple. The frightful riots and the massacre of 1929 began at this wall with a Moslem protest against some matting and a canvas screen which the Jews had erected, and had failed to withdraw when ordered to do so by the British authorities.

The result was that a policeman, waiting for a silent moment in the prayers, removed the offending articles, but found, by the frenzy his act created, that he had accidentally picked on the most sacred moment. The Jews complained to the League of Nations. The dispute wore on for months, and eventually blazed up in a fury of fanaticism and race hatred, in which many Arabs and Jews lost their lives.

Many types of Jew come down to the Wailing Wall. I saw the Polish Jew in his velvet gabardine and his fur-rimmed hat, young Jews with long, sandy hair and side-curls, dark Eastern Jews, Yemenites from Arabia, who look exactly like Arabs, Spanish Jews, and, here and there, a modern Jew in a lounge suit and a cap.

Little prayers, written on scraps of paper, were stuck in the cracks of the stones. One girl wept bitterly as she rocked herself beside the wall, praying perhaps for the recovery of someone from illness, for the Jews believe that Jehovah has never deserted or withdrawn His compassion from those stones. Prayers from Jews all over the world were, and probably are still, offered up at the Wailing Wall in order to gain the privilege of the special sanctity which attaches itself to the wall.

Many of the 'wailers' joined in regular litanies. This is one of them, which the young Zionist translated for me:

*Leader:* For the palace that lies desolate.

*Response:* We sit in solitude and mourn.

*Leader:* For the Temple that is destroyed.

*Response:* We sit in solitude and mourn.

*Leader:* For the walls that are overthrown.

*Response:* We sit in solitude and mourn.

*Leader:* For our majesty that is departed.

*Response:* We sit in solitude and mourn.

This, I suppose, is the lamentation that has been in the heart of the Orthodox Jew since Titus destroyed the Temple of Herod and scattered the race to the four corners of the world.

'Very morbid,' I heard an Englishwoman whisper, after gazing intently at the Wailing Wall for some moments. 'What is the good of crying over spilt milk?'

And, indignantly, she departed.

Only a woman, and an Englishwoman, could, I think, refer to the destruction of the Temple and the Dispersion as 'spilt milk'! But I understand what she meant.

The Jew feels so keenly the sacredness of the Temple area on the other side of the Wailing Wall that he will never enter it.

'There is an idea,' explained the young Zionist with the shamefaced expression of one retailing unworthy superstitions, 'that perhaps the Ark of the Covenant is buried somewhere under the pavements of the mosque, or that perhaps the visitor might, without knowing it, walk on the site of the Holy of Holies. When one of the Rothschilds visited the mosque years ago, he was carried in a chair in case he unwittingly trod on a sacred place.'

I turned again to watch the swaying crowd of Jews nodding and bowing to the tremendous fragment of wall, and I thought that never had I seen anything more determined or more pitiful. It was much more impressive to me than the armful of Zionist literature I had received. I seemed to see a chain of swaying, bearded figures stretching back to Roman times, praying, weeping, pushing their little messages into clefts in the stone and knocking in nails, begging Jehovah to look once again with love and compassion upon the place where His Temple once shone like a mountain of snow.

The tenaciousness of the queer, furtive old Jews who creep about Jerusalem, living spiritually in Old Testament times, ruling their lives by the intricate ordinances that even Titus and his legions could not efface, calls forth respect and also a sense of awe. They still wait and pray

for the coming of the Messiah, and they believe that some day Jehovah, pardoning their sins, will lift from their bent backs the burden of oppression which they have carried down the ages.

Yet not ten minutes' walk from the Wailing Wall is the Jewish Agency, which is settling Zionists on the land. The place is full of typewriters and politicians. They will talk to you in English, in German or in Russian. They never mention Moses, but they can talk, earnestly, vividly and at great length, of electricity. There is in the world no stranger contrast than the Wailing Wall and the Jewish Agency, both intensely Jewish, both burning with a desire to rebuild the Jewish State; but one with the help of God and the other with the assistance of motor tractors.

'The Wailing Wall is, no doubt, a very interesting sight,' said the young Zionist as we walked away.

## CHAPTER TWO

*The Church of the Holy Sepulchre again. I visit the underground quarries which provided the stone for Solomon's Temple and go through the Jewish Quarter on a Sabbath morning.*

### § I

THE AFTERNOON sun was filling the courtyard of the Holy Sepulchre when I made a second visit to that puzzling collection of churches.

It is, at first, difficult to understand its confusing topography. But the two main sites on which the Church of the Holy Sepulchre has been built are the hill of Golgotha, or Calvary, and the garden tomb of St. Joseph of Arimathæa which was 'in the place where he was crucified'.

The church gives one an overwhelming impression of darkness and decay. There were passages so dark that I had to strike matches to find my way. And the decay everywhere of stone, of wood and of iron was fantastic. I saw pictures that were rotting on their canvases and I even saw canvases, still framed, that were bleached white: the last fragments of paint had peeled off, but they were still in position. There were ominous cracks and fissures in stone and marble. I thought how odd it is that extreme devotion can have exactly the same effect as extreme neglect. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre wears its air of shabby decay for the simple reason that the rehanging of a picture, the repair of a stone, and even the mending of a window, assume such gigantic importance in the eyes of the communities that they provoke a situation capable of indefinite postponement.

What an incredible confusion of pillars and passages, of underground caves and semi-underground tunnels, has descended to us over sixteen centuries of battle and burning! It is an extraordinary muddle, and no one can understand this church in one or two visits. It is a labyrinth of passages and chapels embracing the three main shrines.

I ascended and descended steps and, led on by the light of glimmering tapers, explored dark galleries and pitch-black corridors. Once I was brought to a halt by kneeling Franciscans who were visiting the stations of the Cross, the light from their tapers shining on devout bearded faces which might have come from the walls of El Greco's house in Toledo. The first impression of the church is of a series of treasure caves. It is unlike the most ornate Roman Catholic church in Italy or Spain. Its richness and flamboyance are those of the Orient. It is as though the spoils of Asia Minor, of Russia and of Greece, accumulating for centuries, have been heaped in candle-light on the overburdened altars. Art and vulgarity stand side by side. A priceless chalice, the gift of an emperor, stands next to something tawdry and tinsely that might have been pulled from a Christmas tree. And hundreds of ikons, glimmering in old gold, receive candle drippings on the stiff Byzantine figures of saint and king.

The Greek monks swing their censers towards the blaze of candle-light and the blue clouds of their incense spurt out to hang about the ikons and the gilded screens. The worshippers, kneeling on the marble floors, seem to be prostrate before a series of exotic jewellers' shops. Only in the chapel of the Franciscans is there that chastity of decoration which one associates with a Western church. It is plain and rather chilly. It strikes at once the note that divides the Western from the Eastern Church in the Holy Land. Those who associate the Church of Rome with outward gorgeousness of vestment and ritual find in Jerusalem that the Latins are the staid and dowdy 'Protestants', in brown robes girded with a rope, while the Greeks and the Armenians go garmented in scarlet and gold, with crosses of crystal and precious stones carried before them and incense in clouds about them.

Ascending a dim flight of steps, I found myself kneeling on a marble floor with a crowd of hushed people, each one of whom carried a lit candle. The person next to me sighed as though his, or her, heart were breaking. I stole a look

and saw a black Nubian face, the white eyeballs shining in the candle-light, but whether the person was man or woman I could not tell because of the voluminous folds of drapery in which he, or she, was concealed.

We knelt before an altar that shivered in yellow candle-light and glittered with golden lamps and ikons. Divided from this chapel by two pillars, was a similar chapel before which the Franciscans were kneeling, the candle-light moving over their devout, uncomplicated faces. We formed two congregations, kneeling together and facing the same way, but worshipping before separate chapels.

This was the hill of the Crucifixion: Calvary, the holiest place on earth. I looked round, hoping to be able to detect some sign of its former aspect, but that has been obliterated for ever beneath the suffocating trappings of piety. The chapel before which I was kneeling was the Chapel of the Raising of the Cross; the chapel next to it was the Chapel of the Nailing to the Cross.

When the crowd thinned, I approached nearer to the altar. There was a Greek priest there, watching the candles, snuffing some and lighting others. He beckoned me to come near the altar and pointed out a silver disc edged with candle-grease and, below it, a hole in the rock in which, he whispered to me, the Cross of our Lord was fixed. The pilgrims came up, weeping and praying, to touch the rock with trembling fingers; and I went away wishing that we might have known this place only in our hearts.

## § 2

About eighty-five years ago a man named Barclay was walking round the walls of Jerusalem with his dog and a gun. When he came to the Damascus Gate he discovered that the dog was missing. He whistled, but the animal did not appear. Turning back he saw the dog crawling out apparently from beneath the city walls, where he had evidently made a find. He stood barking, asking his master

to come and look at his discovery. When Barclay went over, he found that bushes, shrubs, and the débris of centuries concealed the opening to a cavern which ran under the walls and beneath the city.

Such a discovery in Jerusalem fires the imagination and encourages the wildest rumours. The Arabs believe to this day that in such a cavern the gold and silver treasures of Solomon, the Ark of the Covenant, and the vessels used in the Temple sacrifices, lie waiting to be found. This dream is not confined to the Arabs. I have heard several men, whose opinions claim respect and attention, say that they believe the Ark of the Covenant is hidden somewhere in the mysterious and quite unknown underworld of the Temple area.

So Barclay wisely said nothing and, returning on the following day with a search-party, widened the small hole into which his dog had jumped and entered the cavern.

The torches of the search-party lit up a weird and terrifying scene. The explorers stood in a snow-white cavern, so large that its extremity was hidden in the darkness. One glance at the stone walls told them that it had been artificially made. The torchlight was not powerful enough to penetrate to the end of the cavern. It was an immense excavation that ran on and on beneath the streets of the Old City.

It was soon realised that they had discovered Solomon's Quarries—called by Josephus the 'Royal Quarries'—the quarries which, lost for nearly two centuries, had provided the stone for Solomon's Temple about nine hundred years before Christ.

I think these quarries are one of the most interesting sights in Jerusalem. They are neglected by the average sightseer, although every Freemason who visits Jerusalem is aware of them. Masons from all parts of the world hold lodge meetings there at night, when they will not be disturbed or observed, because they hold the theory that the builders of the Temple were the first Freemasons.

When I visited the quarries, an old Arab who sits at the entrance gave me a lantern and warned me not to fall down



any of the frightful precipices, for Solomon's quarries are no place for the short-sighted or the stumbler.

Another Arab, working in the patch of daylight that penetrates the cave, was shaping paper-weights and small hammers such as chairmen use at meetings. These objects, when decorated with appropriate triangles and compasses, are eagerly bought by masonic visitors and find their way all over the world. Stones from the quarries are also exported to become foundation stones for masonic buildings.

I went into the darkness, swinging my lantern, and the path led steeply down into an enormous entrance cave like a buried cathedral. From this excavation wide, high passages led off in many directions. I pulled up sharply on the edge of chasms and, waving my lantern in the darkness, saw that the rock fell away to lower workings, to more distant and deeper caverns.

It has been estimated that in ancient times sufficient stone had been removed from these quarries to build the modern city of Jerusalem twice over. It is a peculiar and unusual pure white stone, soft to work but hardening rapidly when exposed to the atmosphere. The Arabs call these caverns the 'cotton caves' because they are so white. Here and there, however, when I flashed my lantern towards the lower portions of the roof, I saw a number of black patches. In one place I was near enough to see that they were large bats, hanging to the roof and waiting for the night.

On every hand I noticed the sign of workmen. With a feeling of awe and bewilderment, a feeling that I was dropping down through the very floor of Time, I knew that these workmen had been dead for nearly three thousand years. Yet the marks made by the Phœnician stone-cutters when Solomon was king of Jerusalem were as clean, as sharp and, apparently, as recent, as the marks a man sees in the Portland quarries to-day.

The workmen had cut niches in the walls for their lamps. And it all seemed so new, so modern, that I had the odd feeling that it was lunch hour during the building of the Temple and that at any moment I might hear the returning

feet of Solomon's quarrymen, kicking aside the chips and stones as they poured back to work.

I propped the lantern on a ledge of rock, and by the light of its candle I read the extraordinarily detailed account of the building of the Temple which you will find in the Second Book of Chronicles, chapter two, and the First Book of Kings, chapter five.

I suppose a modern architect could not, given the same number of words, create for us a more accurate and vivid picture of the plans, design, engagement of workmen, rates of pay, building, and furnishing of a great building, than is to be found in these chapters of the Bible.

Down in the darkness of Solomon's quarries, with the white dust of the stone on my clothes, the building of the Temple took on a reality that surprised me. It frequently happens in Palestine that some verse of the Bible, hitherto meaningless, suddenly unlocks itself, and one is left amazed by its minute accuracy. I realized the real meaning of a verse which must have puzzled many people. Verse seven, in the sixth chapter of the First Book of Kings, describing the building of the House of the Lord, says:

'And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither: so that there was neither hammer nor ax nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building.'

I have always imagined that this verse meant that the Temple stone was quarried far away out of earshot of Jerusalem. What else could it have meant? But why should the writer of Kings have stressed the obvious fact that distant quarrying could not be heard on Mount Moriah? Obviously the point of this verse is that the stone with which Solomon built his Temple came almost from beneath the Temple, yet *not a soul heard the cutting of the stones!*

In these quarries you can see how the stone was broken from the bed, how it was passed at once to the masons, who shaped and smoothed it—the floor is in places many

feet deep in tons of chips—and how it went straight into the daylight ready to take its place in the building of the Temple.

No matter how earnestly those in the streets of the city above might have listened for the sound of hammers, they could have heard nothing.

Many stories are, of course, told of a mysterious underground passage which linked the quarries with the Temple. There is a widespread belief that the priests hurriedly hid the Temple treasure in these caverns when the Roman armies under Titus razed Jerusalem and the Temple to the ground. I do not know why treasure hunters should still think it possible to find these precious objects, for it is quite clear that many of them were carried through the streets of Rome when Titus celebrated his triumph. However, one earnest explorer some years ago probed for a secret passage—and found one! In order to reach it you have to bend down and crawl for a few yards into a narrow tunnel about three feet in height, and then you find yourself in another passage of the rock. You are at the extremity of the quarries now and moving under Jerusalem in the direction of the Temple Mount. Suddenly you come up against an ancient fortified wall. What it was for, who built it and when it was built, no one knows.

I left the quarries and went out into the blinding light of afternoon with the feeling that yesterday and to-day are one in the empty caverns where, it seems, the workmen of Hiram, King of Tyre, have just 'knocked off' for a ten-minute break.

### § 3

As the sun sets behind Jerusalem on a Friday night, a hush falls over the Jewish quarter. The Sabbath has begun.

The warren of small houses in the network of narrow streets has been washed clean. You look through archways into small yards scrubbed white. Pots and pans have been scoured. Sabbath lamps are lit. And through the streets of

the old city pass some of the strangest and most picturesque figures in the world to-day: patriarchs in velvet gabardines and round, fur-rimmed hats; pallid, sandy-haired young Jews with fanatical eyes and long hair, two corkscrew curls falling from their temples on each side and tapping against their cheeks; and little boys in their Sabbath garments, leading by the hand some tottering, bent Shylock, grown old and kind.

These are the old-fashioned Orthodox Jews, who live according to the Law of Moses, who weep at the Wailing Wall for the lost glories of Israel, and whose lives are rigidly bound by the minute prohibitions of the Mosaic law.

Their settlement in Jerusalem is recent, as dates go in the ancient city. The Crusaders massacred every Jew and Jewess when they captured Jerusalem. It was not until the Arab conquest and the European persecution of the Jews during the Middle Ages that small groups began to trickle back.

Early one Sabbath morning a young Jew took me round the synagogues in the old city. It was extraordinarily interesting. We plunged straight into the Old Testament. The narrow streets and the labyrinth of houses are full of synagogues, often merely a small room containing a few books on shelves or cupboards, a tribune, and a reading-desk containing the Torah, or Pentateuch, written on parchment and fixed to rollers.

Ancient Jews, with spectacles on the tips of their noses, rocked themselves backwards and forwards as they recited prayers; little boys and young men kept up a perpetual swaying and muttering as they repeated the sacred words.

In a synagogue of Moroccan Jews the congregation sat on the floor like Moors and the women were hidden, like wives in a harem, behind an openwork screen.

In nearly all these synagogues I saw something that illuminated a passage in St. Luke: the story of Jesus as a child of twelve disputing with the rabbis in the Temple. There were small boys in their Sabbath clothes, prayer-rugs over their shoulders, sitting beside their fathers or their

grandfathers, and carefully applying themselves to the Law, repeating the words in monotonous voices and rocking their small bodies.

In one obscure synagogue, I think of Ashkenazim Jews, the morning service had just ended. A lad of about twelve years of age was standing before three bearded elders, talking to them in a precocious and animated manner. Sometimes he pleased them, and they smiled and patted him on the shoulder; but sometimes he annoyed them, and the three old men shook their beards in disagreement and frowned at the lad over their spectacles. But the little fellow stood his ground, waiting respectfully to be spoken to; then, his questions over, he gave a little bob to the old men and walked slowly away.

This, I thought, must have been something like the sight that met the eyes of Joseph and Mary when, seeking Jesus, 'they found Him in the Temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions.'

## CHAPTER THREE

*I go to Bethany, to Jericho, enter the Inn of the Good Samaritan, walk beside the Dead Sea, and visit the Place of Baptism on the banks of the Jordan.*

### § 1

IT IS an extraordinary commentary on the smallness of Palestine that Jesus in the course of His missionary journeys was never more than a hundred and thirty miles distant from Jerusalem. This was on the occasion of His departure to the borders of Tyre and Sidon. The smallness of the country is such that from many of the high ridges of Judæa all the boundaries are clearly visible: snow-capped Hermon to the north, the sandy desert to the south, the Mediterranean Sea to the west, and the high ridge of the Trans-Jordan mountains to the east.

When the Bible says that Moses was shown all the Promised Land from the top of Mount Nebo, it is literally true. From this height, four thousand feet above the Dead Sea, he could see the outline of the entire country. And there are many other mountains from which the same tremendous panorama is visible.

The Life which has meant more to humanity than any other life was, therefore, lived within an astonishingly small compass, and the faith that has created the modern world was born in a country about the size of Wales, and cradled in a part of it—Galilee—that is far smaller than Devonshire.

Jesus, in the words of *Acts*, 'went about doing good'. But when we examine the details of these journeys in the Gospels we realise, perhaps with surprise, that the towns and villages which He visited number only eighteen. It is obvious that during the thirty odd years of His earthly life, Christ must have known this small country of Palestine from end to end. The Gospels, apart from the flight into Egypt mentioned only by St. Matthew, and the disputation

with the elders mentioned only by St. Luke, deal with a brief period in the life of Christ which scholars have estimated to be from eighteen months to three and a half years. These are the years of the Baptism, the Galilean Ministry, and the Crucifixion. How Jesus spent the greater part of His life is a mystery. Not one word has been recorded about it. Some scholars regard this as the most provoking problem in history, while others believe it to be an intentional mystery.

But to the traveller who, like myself, wishes to visit all the places associated with Jesus Christ, the fragmentary nature of the Gospel narratives presents a rather perplexing problem. It is impossible to make a tour based on any detailed chronological sequence. All one can do is to take Bethlehem as the starting-place of one's journey, Nazareth as the place in which Christ's boyhood was spent (where, as St. Luke says, 'the child grew and waxed strong in spirit'), the lakeside of Galilee as the central point of one's travels, and then back to Jerusalem to reconstruct the vivid and well-documented evidence of the Crucifixion.

This, then, is what I propose to do. The journey will take me into many places which are not specifically mentioned in the Gospels as having been visited by Christ, but who can doubt that, if the full story of His journeying were known, His steps would lead one over the length and the breadth of the land, following a thousand paths unknown to us?

One morning I decided to 'run down to Jericho', as they say in Jerusalem. They talk about Jericho as a Londoner might talk about Brighton. 'Have you run down to Jericho yet?' is one of the first questions they ask the stranger, and at every dinner-party someone is sure to offer to 'run you down' for a moonlight bathe in the Dead Sea.

That enigmatic emptiness to the east of the Mount of Olives, which drops into an unearthly wilderness where a strip of intensely blue water receives the shadow of mauve mountains, has powerfully influenced the mentality of Jerusalem. Like a lighthouse on a hill, she has always

watched the Dead Sea country with respect and fear, for who could say what might not come up out of the wilderness, like a ship out of the ocean, to recall her to God?

To the Jewish theologian Jericho and the Jordan Valley were a portent, but to the modern geologist they are a freak. There is in all the world nothing quite like the contrast between the mountain city of Jerusalem, over 2,300 feet above the sea, and the Jordan Valley, only twenty-three miles away, sunk in a hot trench 1,300 feet below the sea. It is a climatic curiosity as fantastic as a strip of Brazilian jungle would be at the foot of Ben Nevis.

When I told a friend that I intended to 'run down' to the Dead Sea for a day, he said:

'Well, be careful to get back before dark.'

'Why?' I asked.

'You might meet Abu Jildah . . .'

'Who is Abu Jildah?'

'He is a brigand who has shot several policemen. There is a price of £250 on his head, and he has a habit of building a wall of stones across the Jericho road, stopping cars, robbing you, and, if you resist, shooting you. He once held up fourteen cars in a row on this road, robbed everyone, threatened to cut off a woman's finger because her rings were tight, and was off and away to the hills by the time the police heard about it. So take my tip and get back before dusk. . . .'

As my friend was giving me this advice I remembered the Parable of the Good Samaritan: 'a certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.'

'Do you think,' I asked, 'that the man who fell among thieves was attacked by someone like Abu Jildah?'

'There is no doubt about it,' my friend replied. 'The road from Jerusalem to Jericho has been notorious throughout history for its robberies and its hold-ups. It is, as you will see, perfect brigand country. It has been suggested that Jesus, in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, was



weaving a parable round an actual happening. He told the story on His way up from Jericho to Bethany on the Mount of Olives, which rather supports this theory. Half-way down to Jericho you will see an old khan on the side of the road—in fact it is the only building, apart from a police post, that you will meet after Bethany. This khan is believed to be the inn mentioned by Jesus in the parable. No doubt it is so, because its rock cisterns prove that an inn has stood on this spot since Bible times. You should stop and go inside. . . . But don't forget to be back before dark!

I set off at ten o'clock. I passed the Damascus Gate and went along the road through the Kedron Valley. It runs to the left, and round this corner Jerusalem was hidden from view. My attention became fixed on a downward road and a succession of nasty corners.

About three miles from Jerusalem a superb panorama of the Dead Sea country lay before me. I could see the white road twisting and turning into a sterile wilderness of parched rock, dropping ever downward into bleakness and solitude. I stopped the car and got out.

I thought that I had never seen anything that looked more like the primitive conception of hell. It was the sort of place that an early Italian painter would have peopled with hairy little devils with horns and forked tails. The hill-sides were either littered with millions of limestone chips or else they were bare and volcanic. Some of the hills were domed or cone-shaped like young volcanoes and others were queerly twisted, tortured and deformed as if chewed up by fire like the clinkers that come out of a furnace.

While I was looking at the terrifying panorama of the Dead Sea, a plump and smiling Arab came up to me holding several slings. He selected a pebble and, whirling the sling round his head, suddenly shot the stone into the air. We watched it drop into a valley half a mile below. He then pointed to a sling and to me, suggesting that I should buy one. To my astonishment I did buy one. Why, I shall never know. I have so far always resisted improbable

salesmen, such as those mournful orientals who try to sell one a carpet in Cannes or Monte Carlo, but after buying a sling on the Jericho Road I shall never again consider myself immune. The Arab then pointed and said, 'Bethany', and, looking in the direction of his arm, I saw that, half hidden round a left-hand bend of the road, was a little Arab village on a slight hill.

It was a huddle of houses that looked like ruins, and ruins that looked like houses. Like nearly all Arab villages, it seemed to have endured a recent artillery bombardment. On the crest of the hill was the relic of a great wall that looked to me like crusader's masonry. The ruin stood up against the sky like an old tooth.

The Arab, who turned out to be the sheikh of Bethany, led me in silence over a narrow path between the haphazard walls of piled boulders. We came to a little door in a wall which he unlocked, then, groping in his robes, he found the end of a candle which he lighted and gave to me, and pointing down into the darkness, said in English, 'The Tomb of Lazarus.'

This used to be a Christian church and one of the most hallowed and ancient of the holy places in Palestine, but at some later period the Moslems seized it and turned it into a mosque, which still stands above the tomb. Entrance to the tomb was forbidden to Christians for centuries and the old entrance was blocked up. In the seventeenth century the Father Custos of the Holy Land, Angelo of Messina, managed, by paying a fat bribe, to open this new door.

We descended about twenty steps into a dark and dusty cave. The flame of the candle lit up a little vestibule and the ruins of a Christian altar. Two steps lower than this vestibule was a small tomb chamber which is the traditional spot from which Christ recalled Lazarus to life. It is an interesting thing that the modern Arabic name for Bethany is el Azareyh, a form of Lazarus or Eleazar. I stumbled up into the sunlight and, getting rid of the sheikh, went up the hill and sat under one of the many olive trees that grow round it.

There is no doubt at all that this is Bethany, although the House of Mary and Martha and the House of Simon the Leper, which the sheikh is only too happy to show you for a coin, cannot possibly be authentic. This huddle of old stones, however, now inhabited by a few Moslem families, stands on the spot which Jesus knew as Bethany—'the Home of Dates'. All one can say is that somewhere on the hill was the house in which Martha, Mary, and their brother, Lazarus, lived.

## § 2

The heat became insufferable and the wilderness seemed to close in on me. The air was hot and still. The khaki rocks flung back the sun like the sides of a furnace. Soon there was but little green to be seen. Black goats were grazing on tufts of coarse grass which grew in the cracks of the rock. Turning a corner, I almost ran into a herd of them. They scattered and leaping to the rocks, their long ears flapping, turned to watch me go by like angry, bearded old men.

Once I met a shepherd painfully climbing the hill, leading his sheep, talking to them all the time, and on his shoulder he carried a lamb, holding it by the four legs as in pictures of the Good Shepherd.

The road now had a sharp cliff on one side and on the other a deep drop into a ravine. It was never straight for very long.

I ran downward to the first sign of life, a well known as the Fountain of the Apostles, from which an old man was filling a pitcher. On my right, a narrow footpath ran back through the hills to Jerusalem. This was the ancient short cut to Bethany, and the road that Jesus and His Disciples would have taken when they went up to the Passover and the Last Supper.

It was not difficult to understand why the road from Jerusalem to Jericho has always been the haunt of bandits. It is a road whose serpentine bends and overhanging cliffs

might have been designed for highway robbery. At hundreds of points along the road are stretches lying between two acute corners and backed by towering cliffs and projecting boulders, where two or three armed men could hold up anything that came along. The robbery once committed, nothing could be easier than an escape into the barren trackless wilderness, where thousands of caves offer secure hiding-places and where a search-party might wander without success for ever.

The road, after diving steadily downward, began to rise. On the crest of the ridge stood the Inn of the Good Samaritan, called by the Arabs Khan Hathrur. As I stopped outside it a man with three laden donkeys came up and halted them in the shadow of the inn.

The building is the usual Turkish khan made to provide safety for men and beasts during the night, and generally placed within an easy journey of a city. The foundations of the khan, and the ancient rock cisterns below it in which water is stored, prove that an inn has been on this site from Roman times and possibly even earlier. There can be no doubt that this is the inn our Lord was thinking of when He told the Parable of the Good Samaritan, because there has never been any other inn between Jerusalem and Jericho.

I read the Parable as I sat in the shadow of the wall. It is a parable that has gone round the world, but I wonder how many people really understand why Jesus told it. He had said farewell to Galilee and was journeying towards Jerusalem and His Crucifixion. His custom was to visit the synagogues, to preach and afterwards to invite discussion. It was probably at Jericho that, after He had preached, a lawyer in the congregation, anxious to display his learning and attempting to provoke Jesus, asked: 'Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' The questioner was a dialectician whose business it was to interpret the Jewish Law. His question was obviously a trap, as Jesus realised, for he countered with the question: 'What is written in the Law? how readest thou?', which, turning the question back on

the questioner, meant: 'You are a lawyer. You have studied these things. Let us have your expert opinion.'

The man replied quoting Deuteronomy and Leviticus, as Jesus knew he must reply: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thy self.'

'Thou hast answered right,' said Jesus, capping the other's quotation with a paraphrase from Leviticus: 'this do and thou shalt live.'

But the lawyer, furious at being so swiftly worsted, thought he still saw a chance to win the battle of wits, and asked at once: 'And who is my neighbour?' It was a new argument! A Jew's neighbour, according to rabbinical law, was only a fellow Israelite. The lawyer felt certain that Jesus would depart from this narrow limitation and would lay Himself open to a charge of heresy. Jesus, seeing this trap as clearly as He had seen the other, replied with a parable. He said:

'A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.'

One can imagine the lawyer writhing unhappily in his seat. He had been trapped as neatly as he had hoped to trap Jesus! He was being forced to admit that one of the

loathed race of Samaritans, one of the detested people with whom the Jews had no dealings, was his 'neighbour'. And the relentless question was put:

'Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?'

We can sense the lawyer's discomfiture in his reply. He cannot bring himself to utter the detested word, Samaritan. It would stick in his throat. Instead he has to admit:

'He that showed mercy on him.'

'Go, and do thou likewise,' says Jesus.

Thus a masterpiece of dialectics is concluded with a story, apparently so simple, but floating like a leaf on deeper currents.

### § 3

When I left the Inn of the Good Samaritan I plunged down into a land of fire. There was no shade anywhere. The sun beat in my eyes and quivered over the barren earth. In a little over half an hour I had left a temperate climate for the heat of the tropics.

There was a post with 'Sea Level' printed on it; and the road still plunged downward, the heat growing even fiercer. A lizard streaked across the path leaving a twisted trail in the fine white dust. A movement on a hill revealed a group of camels, queer prehistoric-looking creatures the very colour of the sandy rocks, grazing with their calves upon the spiky bushes and the unwholesome-looking thorns. Turning a corner, I saw below me a view of the Jordan Valley and of Jericho among its trees and, to the right, the sparkling blue waters of the Dead Sea with the Mountains of Moab, streaked and slashed with shadows, rising from its eastern shores.

Some writers have described this hot gash in the earth's crust as the most horrible place in the world, while others have found it strangely beautiful. It is, I suppose, a matter of temperament or, perhaps, liver. If you are not feeling too well, I can imagine that the Jordan Valley with its

overwhelming heat and its airlessness, and Jericho with its flamboyant vegetation, its reptiles and its insects, could be a terrible nightmare. Here, strangely enough, is the same awful sterility which is encountered only on the summit of great mountains. Just as a man venturing alone above the vegetation belt on a high mountain is sometimes seized with a chill of terror, feeling that he is trespassing in the workshop of God, so in this uncanny trench he feels that he is walking where no man was meant to walk. All round are piled dead rocks twisted in the agony of some prehistoric convulsion, unlike the good clean rocks from which men can build their homes: rocks stained with yellow slime and covered with a ghastly shroud of salt.

The plain over which I was looking is about fourteen miles wide at Jericho. On one side of it rise the terrific mountains of Judæa and, fourteen miles away, facing them, are the mountains of Moab. The Jordan Valley is a trench between them: a parched wilderness of brown hills that lies sweltering in the burning sunlight, and streaked round the Dead Sea with patches of unhealthy white and dirty grey. In the centre meanders a serpentine streak of green. It is formed by the tamarisks, the willows and the green bushes that follow the Jordan's two-hundred-mile windings from the Sea of Galilee, which is, as the crow flies, only sixty-five miles away. And this strange dead-looking world of sandy rock, twisted into weird shapes by ancient disturbances of the earth and stained and streaked with chemicals, is as far below the sea as many a British coal-mine.

The greenness of Jericho rose up, an oasis in the dreadful desolation. From the height of the road it looked much nearer to the Dead Sea than it actually is, but I was soon to learn that nothing in the strange air of the Jordan Valley is more deceptive than one's idea of distance.

I dipped my hand in the Dead Sea and held my wet fingers in the sun. In a few seconds a fine white powder formed on my hand which I found bitter and salt to the taste.

The Dead Sea is beautiful to look at on a sunny day. The report spread by medieval pilgrims of its gloom is entirely false and reflects, perhaps, not the Dead Sea but the minds of those gallant voyagers. The story that no birds can fly across it because of poison in the air is also untrue. There are not many birds because there are no fish in the sea. The few Jordan fish that do get carried into the salt lake are soon cast up mummified on the shores. But the Dead Sea itself is as blue and as sparkling as Loch Lomond or Killarney on a summer's day.

The waters lap the beach of pebbles in oily little waves. There are no shells on the beach, no evidence of any life, no growth of weeds or water plants, for the waters are sterile and dead. The reason why the Dead Sea is a huge cauldron of chemicals is because there is no outlet. It is a vast hole in the earth into which the Jordan and tributary streams pour every day nearly seven million tons of water mixed with sulphurous and nitrous matter. Unable to escape, and subjected to the tremendous heat of the Jordan Valley, this water evaporates, leaving behind enormous deposits of salts and other chemicals in the sea. In the sea-bed there are also hot springs about which little is known. Ordinary sea-water holds from four to six per cent of solids in solution; Dead Sea water holds five times as much. It is impossible for a bather to sink in it and a non-swimmer out of his depth cannot drown as long as he keeps his head. When Titus came to the Jordan Valley in A.D. 70 he caused several slaves to be chained together and flung into the Dead Sea. But they evidently kept their heads, for they emerged alive.

Any horror inspired by the Dead Sea is due to its appalling setting: the banks of chemical slime, the grey landslides of salt, the smell of sulphur, the weird, twisted foothills stained and tortured like the deposit at the bottom of a crucible. The hills are not shaped like ordinary hills: they are more like the fantastic outlines of cooled metal. As one wanders along the desolate shores the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah, which one may, possibly, have thought of



as a tragic allegory, becomes terrifyingly real. It is as though this frightful judgment on human sin has for ever blasted and unhallowed the shores of the Dead Sea.

It was believed at one time that the ruins of those cities lie below the salt waters, but I understand that archæologists are looking for them round the shores. It is all part of the macabre setting that a mountain of salt, which the Arabs have mined for centuries, should exist far to the south, a strange place where twisted white pillars were recognised by the Jews in the time of Josephus as the remains of Lot's wife.

'Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire. . . .'

The words of Genesis take on a horrible significance as one explores the Dead Sea. Fire has smitten the land, piled up the hills in tangled confusion and ripped great rents in the earth's body; and even to-day the smell of brimstone has not faded from the land.

There is, however, a stirring of life at the north end of the Dead Sea, where an ugly factory surrounded by salt pans is extracting all kinds of chemicals from the water. I am told that illimitable wealth lies in the Dead Sea. I was told how much, but I can never believe anything over a million. At the present moment they are separating magnesium chloride, potash, calcium chloride, bromide and common salt from the Dead Sea water. Certain of these products are being exported to all parts of the world.

#### § 4

I took a road straight across the hills and hummocks towards the place of Christ's baptism. It was not really a road: it was an ill-defined cart-track that lost itself in thorn bushes, found itself in holes and swamps and went on twisting and winding towards the thin belt of green that marks the course of the Jordan.

No one knows where the place of the Baptism was, neither do we know where 'Bethany beyond Jordan' was. But the place I discovered among the tamarisk and the willows is that which has been hallowed by centuries of pious pilgrimage. In the old days, when Russia was 'Holy Russia', thousands of pilgrims used to come down to this place to plunge into the Jordan, wearing white gowns which they took home to keep as their shrouds. To-day there are few pilgrims. The custom of bathing at this spot, or somewhere near it, goes back to the most remote times. It was known to the Pilgrim of Bordeaux, who visited the Holy Land in the Roman era—about the year A.D. 333, and one evening in the year 1172 Theodoric saw sixty thousand persons plunge into the river at this spot.

I was not prepared for the strange sight at the end of the road. On the river bank is an odd café, or rest-house, mounted on stilts. The roof is made of Jordan reeds, and everything about it suggests that at any moment the narrow, inoffensive river might overflow and drive the few inhabitants to their boats. Under this frail shelter are set a number of home-made tables and chairs. Hens, chickens, turkeys and goats roam carelessly round the tables. A stuffed crane and a stuffed flamingo, both much the worse for wear, hang with dreary reluctance from the roof. There is a kind of counter, or bar, with a licence which states that this collection of poles and reeds is owned by Mr. N. Stomation. I discovered that the only visible inhabitant was someone, whom I took to be Mr. Stomation, sitting with his back to the Jordan gloomily whittling a stick with a pen-knife. He was in his shirt sleeves, with an ancient khaki tunic flung across his shoulders. He paid no attention to me as I prowled about his strange retreat. The Jordan is apparently always trying to dislodge Mr. Stomation. His dwelling quarters, and also a large dome-shaped oven, are mounted on twelve-foot-high stilts. Even the chickens and the turkeys and the goats must sometimes be forced to run for it, as little pile dwellings to the side of the main quarters testify.

The Jordan, flowing a few yards from this tattered, pre-historic-looking encampment, surprised me. I felt that I was standing on the bank of some English stream, perhaps the Avon in Warwickshire high up beyond the mill in flood-time. I cannot say why I should have felt this, because the banks of the Jordan are thick with exotic, foreign trees and shrubs such as tamarisk and a thin reed, like bamboo. I think it was the way a group of willows dropped their leaves in the water exactly as they do when the Avon floods the meadows round Stratford-on-Avon in March. And as I looked at the Jordan touching the willow leaves and moving them the way of the current, I seemed to be back again in the great happiness of my youth, sitting upon an old green wall near Holy Trinity. There is something slow and gentle and small about the Jordan as it swings round the bend beside the place of the Baptism, something, as I say, very home-like that made me think of those devout paintings on the walls of Venice and Florence in which men have painted Bethlehem and Nazareth like their own towns. It seemed to me that there should be a lesson in this, but a better moralist than myself would have to make it: that a man should travel across the world to see the holy Jordan, and discover it to be just like the little stream at home that runs at the bottom of his garden.

I thought how true this vision of mine was, and how it would probably be contradicted by every tourist who has seen the milky-blue and sandy whirlpools of this river. For the Jordan does flow in every part of the Christian world. Some little drop finds its way into every font at every baptism.

## CHAPTER FOUR

*On the way to Bethlehem I discover a relic of Pontius Pilate.  
I visit Bethlehem, enter the Grotto of the Nativity, and meet  
descendants of the Crusaders.*

### § 1

THE ROAD was like any other road in Palestine. The sky was a hot lid above it. The snapping of grasshoppers in the olive groves was a steady rhythm in the heat.

The road was white with the dust of powdered limestone, a floury dust which the heels of the donkeys kicked up in clouds; but the soft feet of the camels hardly moved it, as they passed silent as shadows. White stone walls lay on either side, and behind them the stony terraces, planted with olive trees, lifted themselves in sharp white ridges against the darkness of the sky. Little brown lizards with the watchful heads of frogs lived in the chinks of the stones. They would come out to lie in the sun, still as the stones, except for a quick beating in their throats. Sometimes I could go to within a yard of them, and would be just about to touch them with an olive twig, when, swift as a whiplash flicked out of the dust, they would be gone.

The heat was a nervous tension enclosing the world. All sounds were an invasion, except that of the grasshoppers, which was the palpitating voice of the heat. A shepherd boy piped somewhere on the hill, playing a maddening little tune without beginning or end, a little stumbling progress up and down a scale, like the ghost of a waterfall. And the white road led on under the sun.

It was, as I have said, just like any other road in Palestine. But there was one thing that marked it out from all other roads in the world. It was the road to Bethlehem.

As I walked on, I thought that travel in Palestine is different from travel in any other part of the world because Palestine exists already in our imagination before we start

out. From our earliest years it begins to form in our minds side by side with fairyland, so that it is often difficult to tell where one begins and the other ends. Therefore the Palestine of reality is always in conflict with the imaginary Palestine, so violently at times that many people cannot relinquish this Palestine of the imagination without a feeling of bereavement. That is why some people go away disillusioned from the Holy Land. They are unable, or unwilling, to reconcile the real with the ideal.

Any truthful account of travel in Palestine must mention this conflict. Every day you hear travellers say, as they visit some place: 'I never imagined it quite like that,' or 'I always thought of it in a different way.'

And as I went on to Bethlehem I remembered a place hushed in snow where shepherds wrapped in thick cloaks watched their flocks under the frosty stars. There was a little shelter in this place in which beasts stamped in their stalls and blew the fog of their breath into the cold air. On the straw near the mangers, sitting in exquisite detachment, was a Mother with a gold circle about her head and a little Child. The stars shone coldly, and through the air came a sound of far-off bells.

I know perfectly well that this picture was edged with gilt. It was my own private little vision of Bethlehem, something that has been with me all my life, something made up in my mind from Christmas cards sent to me when I was a child, from pictures that I loved before I could read, something formed by the piety and reverence which a cold northern land has cast round the story of the Nativity. Every Christian nation has translated the story of Christ into its own idiom and cradled Him in its own barns. The great medieval painters have, each man in his own way, painted in the national background of his own country and his own time. And we who come from Europe to Palestine come from an enchanted country to the bare rocks and crags of reality.

I walked along in the airless heat, sorry to say farewell to this little picture of mine; and the heat of the white road

to Bethlehem quivered like fire over the limestone walls and beat like the breath of a furnace upon the grey little olive trees and shone through the greenness of the uncurling fig leaves.

I came to a place where a few trees made a pool of shade on the dust of the road. And under the trees was an old well with a stone basin beside it, so that shepherds and camel-men could pour out water for their beasts.

This well, like so many things in this land, has several names. Some call it Mary's Well, because of an old story that the Holy Family, travelling the five and a half miles between Bethlehem and Jerusalem, once rested there and drank its waters. It is also called the Well of the Star. The legend is that the Wise Men on their way to Bethlehem lost the Star and, coming to this well to slake their thirst, found it again shining in the water.

I went on, past the white domed Tomb of Rachel, which is venerated by Christian, Jew and Moslem, and, just where the road branches off to Hebron, I looked over a stone wall and saw something which an archæologist in Jerusalem had told me not to miss; the only surviving relic of Pontius Pilate. It is the ruin of an aqueduct which ran from the Pools of Solomon to the Temple Area. It was an engineering work which involved Pilate in a financial scandal.

Pilate was appointed procurator in Judæa in A.D. 26 and remained in office for ten years. The custom of long-term governors was approved by Tiberius, who used to say with bitter cynicism that an enriched governor was better for a country than a new and still rapacious one. Much more is known of Pilate's career in Palestine than is to be found in the Gospels. Josephus and Philo give long, but biased, accounts of his record.

He expressed an active dislike for the Jews and a bewildered contempt for their religious taboos. He regarded them as dangerous maniacs and instigators of every kind of sedition. He had the plain, blunt soldier's loathing for the political intrigue by which he was surrounded, and he possessed the worldly man's dislike for the fanaticism which

he met at every step. He lost his temper quickly and frequently ordered his troops to attack the Jews; but, reading the history of his time, one wonders what else he could have done. Roman tolerance was always interpreted as weakness.

His first act did not endear him to the Judæans. It was a custom with the Romans, who always observed the greatest respect for the religious beliefs of their subject peoples, never to permit troops to march into Jerusalem with the image of the Emperor on the legionary standards. These were always unscrewed and put away out of deference to the Mosaic injunction against graven images. Pilate, however, when moving troops up to Jerusalem, marched them into the city under cover of darkness with the eagle and the imperial image on the tops of the standards.

When the Jews awakened in the morning and saw this, the city was in an uproar. Deputations surrounded his palace for five days, begging him to remove the images. He threatened that unless the agitators went away he would order a massacre. On the sixth day he was forced to meet the deputations, who cried that they would willingly die rather than suffer the violation of their laws. Pilate was beaten and had to order the removal of the eagles.

Another and an even more serious conflict was that of the aqueduct whose remains still lie beside the Bethlehem road. In order to bring water from Solomon's Pools to the Temple (although his enemies said that the water was really intended for military purposes in the event of an insurrection), Pilate raided the enormous funds known as the Corban, lying in the Temple treasury. The appropriation of this money created violent opposition. The storm broke when Pilate came up to Jerusalem from his headquarters at Cæsarea, probably during the annual Passover pilgrimage, when he was always present with extra troops in case of trouble. This time Pilate sent troops disguised as Jewish pilgrims among the crowds. These troops, at a signal, attacked the Jews and quelled the disturbance. If this episode occurred at Passover time, there seems to be an echo of it in St. Luke, who mentions the 'Galileans whose

blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices'. Should this supposition be correct, a remarkable possibility is dependent on it. The Galileans whom Pilate slew were not subject to him: they were the subjects of Herod Antipas. Now, when Pilate handed Jesus, the Galilean, over to Herod, we learn from St. Luke 'and the same day Herod and Pilate were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves.'

If it is possible that Pilate sent Jesus as a peace-offering to the ruler of Galilee in return for the Galileans he had attacked on a previous occasion, then the strange thought occurs that the building of this aqueduct—the cause of the original enmity between Pilate and Herod—was a contributory factor in the crucifixion of Jesus. . . .

I climbed over the wall and inspected this extraordinary relic. Few people know that it exists and, unless someone takes care of it, the remaining water-pipes, or rather stones, will be carried away and used for building material. In fact the head of the Magi's well farther back along the Jerusalem road is one of these stones.

The aqueduct runs at the edge of the boundary wall and disappears from sight beneath a house. It is formed of huge blocks of stone with a central hole drilled in them, and so arranged that each stone fitted with a neck firmly into the next, making a solid rock channel for the water.

If the theory I have advanced is reasonable, this line of stones is one of the strangest and most significant relics in the world. In any case, a few of them deserve a place in Jerusalem's magnificent new museum.

I went on towards Bethlehem thinking of Pilate and of the odium that has been cast on his name. The trial of Jesus gives us a full-length portrait of the Roman: haughty, blunt, weak enough to be blackmailed, but distinguished from the Jews by a sense of justice. He did try to save Jesus. He tried again and again with a growing sense of exasperation and hopelessness. The Jews, with that brilliant insight into the weak spot in human nature, a gift that has never deserted them, suddenly ceased from attacking Christ



and attacked Pilate. The cry went up: 'If thou release this man, thou art not Cæsar's friend!' It was blackmail. And it sealed the fate of Jesus.

Pilate's attitude changed when that cry went up. He had good reason to visualise an influential embassy visiting Rome behind his back and plotting against him. 'The Governor of Judæa,' they would say, 'has set free a man who calls himself King. He is not Cæsar's friend.'

Pilate owed everything to Tiberius. One word from the Emperor and he fell from power, perhaps into exile and disgrace. Pilate knew, and the Jews knew, that there is nothing easier to poison than the mind of an autocrat.

So Pilate, too weak and too worldly to challenge the voice of the blackmailer, was once more beaten by the Jews. As a last gesture of disapproval he called for water and washed his hands.

He survived in office for another six years: until, in fact, he made a serious error in judgment which those who lay in wait for him used in order to procure his recall. A certain impostor appeared in Samaria and summoned the Samaritans to the top of Mount Gerizim, promising to reveal to them the sacred vessels which he said Moses had buried there. An armed crowd gathered at a village called Tirabatha. Pilate, who was always on the look-out for armed rebellion, misjudged the seriousness of the assembly and sent troops to disperse it, which they did with great slaughter. The Samaritans appealed to Vitellius, the Legate of Syria and Pilate's superior, who, finding that Pilate was in error, had no other choice than to send him to Rome to answer the charges made against him. While he was on his way to Rome Tiberius died, and the inquiry into Pilate's conduct was apparently forgotten in the confusion of the new reign. So Pilate disappears from history to emerge again in legend. It was related in very early times that, falling into disgrace under Caligula, Pilate committed suicide. But there is no historical justification for this story.

In the apocryphal gospels, *The Acts of Pilate* and the *Gospel of Peter*, which were written centuries after Pilate's

death, he is shown in a favourable light and is assured of divine forgiveness.

Legend, however, shows him, like Judas, pursued by demons of remorse and despair. It was said that his body was flung into the Tiber, but evil spirits so terrified the neighbourhood that it was taken up and conveyed to Vienne, in the south of France, where it was flung into the Rhône. There the same thing happened. The body was therefore taken up a third time and carried to Lausanne, in Switzerland, where it was walled up in a deep pit surrounded by mountains. Another story says that Pilate's corpse was eventually flung into a dark lake on the mountain still known as Pilatus, and it is recorded that people travelling by night in those desolate parts have been horrified to see a white figure walk from the lake and go through the motion of washing its hands.

## § 2

The white houses cluster on the hill like a group of startled nuns. They stand on the edge of the road and gaze down into a pit of heat. Where the striped terraces end and the bare rock begins, the last olive trees seem to be struggling desperately to run back up the stony terraces away from the heat and the sterility of the rock. The white houses watch them with open mouths that are doors, and startled eyes that are windows. And the hot sunlight beats down from the blue sky.

Above the flat, white roofs rise the bell-towers of convents and orphanages and monasteries. There is always a bell ringing in the heat. If it is not the bell of the Salesian Fathers, it may be the bell of the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul. At the bottom of the road that leads up to this white hill-town is a notice-board which absurdly pins this region to reality: 'Bethlehem Municipal Boundary,' it says. 'Drive slowly.'

The traveller, approaching Bethlehem with his mind on

St. Luke and Botticelli, pauses in surprise before this board because it has never before occurred to him that Bethlehem could be confined by municipal boundaries. It seems to him, at first, almost sacrilege that Bethlehem should possess a mayor and a municipality. Then, when he ceases to feel and begins to think, it occurs to him that the Mayor of Bethlehem is a wonderful symbol. He is a sign of an almost terrifying continuity of human life. His predecessors in office extend back before the time of Christ into the days of the Old Testament, and probably into dim, distant regions of legend. Bethlehem is typical of the strange immutability of these Palestinian towns. Wave after wave of conquest has swept over them without, apparently, making much difference to them. Bethlehem has known the Jews, the Romans, the Arabs, the Crusaders, the Saracens and the Turks. They have all erected their notice-boards on her boundaries. And now there is one in English at the bottom of the hill asking you to 'drive slowly'.

As you walk up the hill into Bethlehem, wishing only to be left alone, young Arabs in European clothes, red tarbushes above their eager faces, greet you and lead you against your will into strange little shops. There you are offered pious objects carved in mother of pearl, in olive wood, and in a black stone that comes from the Dead Sea. If these fail, they try to sell you the wedding dress of a Bethlehem woman. When you ask what on earth you would do with such an embarrassing possession, they smile and thrust the garments towards you:

'You have no wife? Ah, young English ladies much like! Very pretty . . . Look, sir . . .'

But they seem quite pleased if you buy only a post card.

The British passion for justice, which to the Arab is one of the many perplexing problems about his new master, is stamped clearly on the ancient face of Bethlehem in the form of a new building: the Bethlehem Police Station.

'Justice!' an Arab is reported to have said. 'In the old days of the Turk we paid money to the judge and knew the result beforehand, but now we pay much more money to

the solicitor and know nothing till the case is over. And you call that Justice!'

But the police station is like a new bookplate in a very old book. It is a sign of the latest owner. Its very newness accentuates the illusionary nature of possession. A few paces beyond it the narrow main street of Bethlehem begins, running now up and now down through the clustered warren of white houses. Even in Rhodes and Malta and Cyprus, where, so I believe, the Crusades have lingered in bastion and outwork, there could be nothing so vividly crusading as the main street of Bethlehem. Here the Crusaders are still alive! They look at you with their blue European eyes. Although they call themselves Christian Arabs, their faces are Flemish and French, and, perhaps, English. Old women sit in the shade of white walls and lift towards you the lined face of an authentic Memling.

The dress of the Bethlehem woman, which is unique, is also a memory of the Crusades. The married women wear a high head-dress covered with a flowing veil which is pinned under the chin and falls down the back and over the shoulders. This is believed to be the fashion that in Europe developed into the tall foolscap with its pendant veil, the head-dress worn by nearly all princesses in fairy tales. Whether the fashion was brought to Palestine by European women during the Crusades, or whether it was developed by them in the East—a version of the silver horn head-dress that has only recently died out in Syria—and carried back to Europe, I am not able to say. But those who have studied this question, and that of Bethlehem's crusading blood, agree that both the fashion and the face beneath it are a relic of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem.

Why should this not be so? Bethlehem is an entirely Christian town. In punishment for an insurrection the Moslems were driven out about a century ago by the terrible Ibrahim Pasha, whose memory lingers in Bethlehem much as that of Judge Jeffreys lingers in Wiltshire. It is true that recently some Moslems have come back, but there are very few of them.

Throughout the centuries the Christian community, descendants, if you like, of the Crusaders, have lived in Bethlehem, keeping very much to themselves, marrying and intermarrying and thus preserving the marked European strain. The women are very shy. They expend great ingenuity in avoiding the cameras of tourists. They fly from a camera as from the devil.

The town itself is small and unspoilt. Shops and workshops line a part of the main street. They are merely arches open to the road, which is so narrow that the cobbler can sit at his last and talk to his friend, the grocer, on the opposite side of the road without raising his voice.

The impression I received in Bethlehem was one of peace and graciousness. Jerusalem is taut with mental conflict. Bethlehem is quiet and, I think, happy. For once the prevailing Mohammedanism is keyed down and almost inaudible. There is only one muezzin in Bethlehem, but there are many bells.

I thought at times that if the white houses had been bowered in trees, or if bougainvillea had spilt itself from white walls, I might have imagined myself in some little town of Andalusia. But one is never quite permitted to imagine this. The hot highlands of Judæa are always visible through an archway or at the end of a street.

I once read a story, I think it was written by H. G. Wells, in which someone discovered a door in a very ordinary wall which led into the Garden of the Hesperides. The memory of it came to me in Bethlehem when I encountered a door in a massive wall. It was so low that even a dwarf would have to bend his head in order to pass through it. On the other side of it was the Church of the Nativity. They say in Bethlehem that all the doors into this church were walled up long ago, except this one, which was made low in order to prevent the infidel from riding into the building on horseback and slaying the worshippers.

But no sooner had I bent my head and stepped across than I straightened up—in Rome! It was the Rome of Constantine the Great, or, perhaps I should say, New Rome. It

was the biggest surprise I had had in Palestine. I expected the usual ornate church, the dark, burdened altars, the confused stairs and passages of a reconstructed building, and here I was in a cold, austere Roman basilica. Massive Corinthian pillars made of some dull red stone upheld the roof and divided the church into a nave and aisles. I was in the church that Constantine the Great built long ago as a sign that he had become a Christian. Surely one of the marvels of Palestine is the fact that this church should have survived the dangers that have swept the other buildings of its time to dust? Here it is, the earliest Christian church in use to-day, and more or less as it left the hands of its builders. On the walls are the remains of dim gold mosaics.

I looked up to the roof. Is there, I wondered, anything left of the English oaks with which Edward IV reconstructed the roof of the Church of the Nativity? He cut down oaks and sent tons of lead for this purpose, which the Republic of Venice transported to Jaffa. There the Franciscans took charge of the pious gift and conveyed it to Bethlehem. I believe the lead was melted down by the Turks in the seventeenth century and used as bullets against the very Republic that had conveyed it to Palestine; but somewhere, perhaps, high up above the Roman nave, may linger a fragment of oak from the forests of fifteenth-century England.

The church is built above a cave which was recognised as the birthplace of Jesus Christ two centuries before Rome became a Christian state. The grotto must have been sacred to Christians in the time of Hadrian. In order to defame it, as he tried to defame Golgotha, he built over it a temple to Adonis. Constantine pulled down this temple and built this present church in its place. There seems to me something so touchingly formal about it, as if the Roman Empire did not yet quite understand this new faith, but was making a first, puzzled genuflection in its direction. One feels that these pillars are really the pillars of a temple to Jupiter.

A service was in progress. I thought the choir was filled with nuns, but they were ordinary Bethlehem women wearing

the tall veiled head-dress of the town. Beneath the high altar is the cave which tradition claims as the spot where Christ was born. It is entered by flights of steps set on each side of the choir. On the way down I had to press myself against the dark little staircase as two Greek monks, black of eye and beard, came up in a cloud of incense.

Fifty-three silver lamps hardly lighten the gloom of the underground cavern. It is a small cave about fourteen yards long and four yards wide. Its walls are covered with tapestry that reeks of stale incense. If you draw this tapestry aside, you see that the walls are the rough, smoke-blackened walls of a cave. Gold, silver and tinsel ornaments gleam in the pale glow of the fifty-three lamps.

I thought I was alone in the cavern until someone moved in the darkness, and I noticed the policeman who is always on duty to prevent disputes between the Greek and the Armenian priests. This church, like the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, suffers from divided ownership. It is in the hands of the Latins, the Greeks, and the Armenians.

So jealous are the various churches of their rights that even the sweeping of the dust is sometimes a dangerous task, and there is a column in which are three nails, one on which the Latins may hang a picture, one on which the Greeks may do so, and a neutral nail on which no sect may hang anything.

In the floor there is a star, and round it a Latin inscription which says: 'Here Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary.' The removal of this star years ago led to a quarrel between France and Russia which blazed into the Crimean War.

Such truths may seem terrible; but this, alas, is an imperfect world. It is therefore necessary, as you stand in the Church of the Nativity, or in the Holy Sepulchre, to try and forget the frailties of men and to look beyond them to the truth and the beauty which they seem to obscure.

As I stood in this dark, pungent cavern I forgot, I am afraid, all the clever and learned things written about the Nativity by German professors, and I seemed to hear English voices singing under a frosty sky:

O come, all ye faithful,  
Joyful and triumphant,  
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem.

How different is this dark little cave under a church from the manger and the stable of one's imagination! As a child, I thought of it as a thatched English barn with wooden troughs for oats and hay, and a great pile of fodder on which the Wise Men knelt to adore 'the new-born Child'. Down the long avenues of memory I seemed to hear the waits singing in the white hush of Christmas night:

While shepherds watched their flocks by night,  
All seated on the ground,  
The Angel of the Lord came down,  
And glory shone around.

There was a rhythmic chinking sound on the dark stairs. A Greek priest, with a black beard curled like that of an Assyrian king, came slowly into the cavern swinging a censer. The incense rolled out in clouds and hung about in the candle flames. He censured the altar and the Star. Then, in the most matter-of-fact way, he genuflected and went up into the light of the church.

Beneath the church is a warren of underground passages. In one of them, a dark rock chamber, St. Jerome conducted a number of his keen controversies and translated the Vulgate.

But I found my way back to the cavern where the incense drifts in the lamp flames. The grotto was full of little children, silently standing two by two on the stairs. They came forward, knelt down and quickly kissed the stone near the star. Their little faces were very grave in the candle-light. Some of them closed their eyes tightly and whispered a prayer.

No sooner had the last of them gone, than I heard the chink-chink of the censer; and into the gloom of the Grotto of the Nativity came again a Greek priest like an Assyrian king.



## § 3

There are a number of old houses in Bethlehem built over caves in the limestone rock. These caves are exactly the same as the sacred grotto under the high altar of the Church of the Nativity, and they are probably as ancient. No one who has seen these houses can doubt that Jesus was born in one of them, and not in the stable of European tradition.

I suppose the idea that Christ was born in a stable was suggested by St. Luke's use of the word 'manger'. To the Western mind this word presupposes a stable or a barn, or some outbuilding separate from the house and used as a shelter for animals. But there is nothing in St. Luke to justify this.

These primitive houses in Bethlehem gave me an entirely new idea of the scene of the Nativity. They are one-room houses built over caves. Whether these caves are natural or artificial I do not know: they are level with the road, but the room above them is reached by a flight of stone steps, perhaps fifteen or twenty. The caves are used to this day as stables for the animals, which enter from the road level. There are, in most of them, a stone trough, or manger, cut from the rock, and iron rings to which the animals are tied during the night.

The family occupy the upper chamber, separated only by the thickness of the rock floor from the cave in which the animals sleep.

Now, if Joseph and Mary had visited the 'inn' at Bethlehem and found it full, there would have been no stable for them to go to, because the 'inns', or khans, in the time of Christ were merely open spaces surrounded by a high wall and a colonnade under whose arches were rooms for the travellers. The animals were not stabled in the European sense, but were gathered together in the centre of the enclosure. The Greek word *katalyma* used by St. Luke, and translated as 'inn', would be more exactly rendered as 'guest-chamber'.

Therefore I believe we must imagine the Nativity to have

taken place in one of these old cave-houses of Bethlehem. The guest-chamber, or upper room, which it was the Jewish custom to offer to travelling Jews, was evidently already occupied, and therefore the host did his best by offering to the Holy Family shelter of the downstairs room, or cave.

It is interesting in this connection to remember that the earliest tradition in the Church was that Jesus was born not in a stable or an inn, but in a cave. Justin Martyr, who was born about A.D. 100, repeats a tradition current in his time that, as Joseph had no place in which to lodge in Bethlehem, he discovered a cave near by. But even before Justin's time it seems that the cave below the Church of the Nativity was venerated as the scene of Christ's birth. It is not unreasonable to assume that the caverns below this church were once above ground and formed the bottom storeys, or basements, of inhabited houses.

St. Matthew, describing the birth of Jesus, says:

'And when they were come into the *house*, they saw the young Child with Mary his mother; and fell down, and worshipped him.'

One of the houses which I visited might have remained unchanged since the time of Christ. The man was attending to the animals, two donkeys and a foal, which were tied up to the rock in the cave. In the room above the woman was sifting some small grain, like millet, through a sieve. From time to time she talked to her husband as he busied himself in the room beneath.

The living-room was, like most rooms in the East, bare of furniture. In a corner of it were the matting beds rolled up and tucked away out of sight.

The thought came to me that the nearest approach to the kind of building in which Christ was born is probably a Connemara cabin. I remember once going to a wake in a little white cabin rather like these Bethlehem houses, except that it was all on one floor. The living-room was separated from the animals' quarters by a pole and a curtain of sacking.

The noise of beasts stamping came clearly to us as we sat round the turf fire. I remember thinking at the time that perhaps the Nativity took place in the same humble surroundings.

#### § 4

A friend who has lived most of his life in Jerusalem, and speaks Arabic perfectly, met me in Bethlehem, and together we explored the alley-ways and the courtyards. While we were looking at a Roman mill in a dark stone crypt, a girl came out on a flight of stairs to one side of the courtyard and began talking to us. My friend suddenly turned into an Arab and began pinching the air with his fingers, putting his head on one side and making graceful gestures with his hands.

The girl laughed and he laughed.

'What are you talking about?' I asked.

'I am asking her to let us enter the house,' he said. 'She has gone to ask her father.'

She came out again and leaned over the balcony. She was the loveliest girl I had seen in Palestine. I think she was about eighteen. I was delighted to discover that women do still exist in Palestine who justify the rhapsodies of Solomon.

'She says,' explained my friend, 'that we must wait until the cobbler has gone, because he is a great gossip and it would be all over Bethlehem in five minutes that strange men were received in the house. But we are invited to enter.'

So we poked about the yard, pretending to be interested in the old stones, until we saw the cobbler come down the steps holding a pair of old shoes. Then we went up the stairs and entered the house.

There was an outer room, or hall, with a room on each side of it. They were quite bare of furniture. The family was poor and humble. They worked in the fields. The father was a grey-bearded old Arab in a brown *galabieh*, and the mother was resting on a mat covered with a blanket.

The girl brought in an elder sister and a beautiful little

child with yellow hair. We all sat on the floor and my friend talked as if he had known these people for years. The place rocked with laughter.

'I am,' he said, 'going to show you what the Bethlehem women wear under their veils. I am asking the elder girl, who is a widow, to put on her wedding dress.'

By what process of bare-faced flattery, or by what charm of manner, he was able to do this, I cannot say. But the surprising fact is that the girl, blushing charmingly, disappeared to put on her bridal garments.

'How on earth can you come into a strange house and order people about like this?' I asked.

'Oh,' he said, 'the Arabs are extraordinarily nice people and so easy to handle if you know how to tackle them.'

The younger sister, who, I thought, would make a perfect model for Ruth, entertained us with a bright flow of talk until her sister arrived in her heavily embroidered wedding garments, with her *znekb*, or chain, and the high Bethlehem head-dress with its flowing white veil. She readily removed the veil and showed me that the little tower from which it hangs is a small red fez held upright on the head by two cords which tie beneath the chin. All round this little fez are sewn row upon row of coins. The *znekb* hangs from the head-dress and contains ten coins with a central pendant.

'Those coins represent a bride's dowry,' explained my friend, 'and it is possible that they illustrate our Lord's parable of the Lost Coin. You remember how it goes: "What woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently until she find it?" And so on. Now, why should she be so anxious to find one piece out of ten?'

'I have always considered it a tribute to the carefulness of women.'

'So have most people. But there is more to it than that. In Jewish times ten drachmæ, or ten pieces of silver, were sewn on the head-dress of the married woman, and to lose one of them was a terrible reflection on her carefulness and, possibly on her wifely respect for her husband. It may also

have flung her into the superstitious fear into which the loss of a wedding ring will fling a modern wife. That was why the woman in the parable took a lamp and swept the house with such anxiety. . . .’

The family were too poor to offer the usual coffee, but they made up for it by the charm of their manners and their air of fine breeding. The old man talked to us of the approaching harvest and the poverty of the times. His wife, tired out after a day in the barley fields, talked to us from her bed on the floor.

‘I can point out the explanation of another parable to you,’ said my friend. ‘You see the matting bed. When an Arab family is young, father, mother, and all the children unroll a large mat and retire to sleep on it, lying together in a row. You remember the Parable of the Stranger. Jesus drew a picture of a man who is knocked up, after he has retired to rest, by a friend who asks for three loaves. The man replies that he cannot oblige the stranger for “the door is now shut and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee.” You can see that, like the *fellah* in Palestine to-day, the man in the parable could not get up, once he had gone to bed, without awakening the entire family.’

We said our good-byes and descended the steps. The two girls hung over the balcony, the young one like Ruth and the other in her crusading veil; and their laughter followed us into the little narrow street where the donkeys passed with their loads.

## CHAPTER FIVE

*I travel through Samaria and meet the last Samaritans. I stop for a while in Nazareth and watch the village carpenter at work.*

### § 1

I ONCE believed that the phrase 'from Dan to Beersheeba' indicated the extremes of distance. Nothing, it seemed to me, could be farther apart than these two places. In actual fact, a man in a good car can breakfast on the ruined hill of Dan under the Lebanons and eat his evening meal beside the wells of Abraham on the desert plain round Beersheba in the south.

Distances are surprisingly short. Jerusalem is only about seventy-five miles from Nazareth and about one hundred miles from Tiberias and the Lake of Galilee. Bethlehem, as I have said, is only a five-mile walk from Jerusalem, and Jericho is under twenty miles from the capital.

That the smallness of Palestine should be a perpetual surprise to me is probably because the Bible is pervaded by an atmosphere of spaciousness. When Jesus turned His back on Nazareth and went to Capernaum, I used to think that He had made a long journey; but He had only walked to a place about twenty-five miles away. The wanderings of the patriarchs suggest tremendous journeys, whereas, in reality, they could probably be packed into two or three English counties. When David stood on the hills round Jerusalem he could actually see the country of his enemies, the Philistines, about twenty miles off to the west. All the dynastic dramas and the inter-tribal strife of the Old Testament occurred in a region not much larger than the Highlands of Scotland.

In the old days, it is true, the illusion of size was present because of the mountains and the difficulty of transport. Old-fashioned guide books, printed before the War when travellers went through Palestine on horseback, allow five

or six days for a journey that can now be accomplished comfortably by car, and over excellent modern roads, in a day.

The motor-car has, of course, revolutionised transport in Palestine. It has unfortunately killed the picturesque, long-distance camel caravans and caused the romantic desert khans, or inns, to fall into ruin and decay. Only a few years ago the pace of Palestine was that of a string of baggage camels doing an average of twenty to twenty-five miles a day. Goods, once carried by camels from Bagdad to Damascus, and on to Jerusalem, are now borne by powerful motor-lorries driven at top speed by Arabs who have no fear of death.

The road from Jerusalem to Nazareth descends from the mountains on which Jerusalem is enthroned into a blinding, burning valley where every hill is marked with the ghosts of ancient terraces.

In the time of Christ these Judæan hills must have been covered with fig, olive and vine. You can see signs of ancient cultivation running in bands round the hills, just as under the grass of English meadows you can sometimes trace the line of old furrows.

Now up and now down, and always rising or falling in a series of double hairpins, the road goes on through the yellow hills into the country of the Tribe of Benjamin. Where the road bent sharply to the right, I saw a straight track leading away over a narrow plain and another, crossing it, leading in the opposite direction. The first was the road over which St. Paul was led by night to Cæsarea, and the other was the old Roman road to Damascus.

Every little hill carried on its crest a village whose name is known to millions of people, the little villages of the Old Testament. They looked like rows of mud boxes ranged in lines round a hill-top. Girls with water-pots on their shoulders walked through fields of growing barley, and beside the road stood little boys like young David, fitting smooth pebbles into the bag of their slings. I have never

until now felt sorry for Goliath! But, with all his size and strength, he must have had about as much chance against David and his sling as a man with a spear would have against a modern gunman. The sling, when wielded by a practised hand, can be a deadly weapon.

One has to visit Palestine to understand how meticulously accurate is the Bible. It has become the fashion to say that the Old Testament is a collection of Jewish fables, and I am sure some young people to-day imagine that men like Saul and David never existed. Not only did they exist, but to-day there are men whose lives and outlook are exactly the same. You meet them on every road. The Bible is a most accurate guide to the life of modern Palestine. Let me give an instance.

I stopped at a humble little village. I do not know the name of it. There were some few fields round about it, a well near it, and a baked mud road leading through to the flat-roofed houses and the little mosque. In a clearing near the village several women sat beside a black pot beneath which blazed the thorn bushes that grow all over Palestine. As the thorns burned they made a crackling, splitting sound, and I realised the descriptive power of that famous line in *Ecclesiastes*: 'As the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool.'

To me, one of the fantastic things about Palestine is that people so obviously ancient Canaanites should be called Arabs and should worship Allah!

In the fields round the villages men were unconsciously illustrating the Bible. One man was guiding a plough drawn by an ox and a camel. This is very unfair on the smaller animal. The wooden yoke sinks from the high camel to the low ox so that he bears more than his share of the weight, and this clumsy arrangement chafes the necks of both animals.

Is not this exactly what St. Paul meant in his Second Epistle to the Corinthians: 'Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness, and what communion hath light with darkness?'



There was another ploughman. He drove a restless, difficult ox. The beast was not broken in to the plough. He lowered his head and tried to back. The ploughman carried in his hand a pointed stick used for scraping the earth from the ploughshare. Whenever the ox grew difficult he prodded him with the spike, and I knew that I was seeing something that Jesus had seen and noticed as He walked the roads of Palestine.

'Saul, Saul,' cried Jesus, 'why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.'

I came to a little village called El-Bireh, which, it is said, was the place where Joseph and Mary missed Jesus on their return from Jerusalem to Nazareth. They retraced their steps and found their Son disputing with the elders in the Temple. This incident, which is given only by St. Luke, has often been questioned by the higher critics. Some writers have considered it inconceivable that parents would not have missed a child during 'a day's march'. On the spot, however, the explanation is very simple. A 'day's march' in the East is generally the distance covered in seven hours of slow travel. But the first day's march by caravan was always a short distance, because these large and confused assemblies were often late in starting. On the main roads round Jerusalem are ruined khans, only a few miles from the city, which mark the first short 'day's march'. El-Bireh has such a ruin. It was here that the Nazareth caravans rested and spent the night before setting off in earnest on the following morning.

What could be easier than that Joseph and Mary should have missed Jesus in the confusion of an Eastern departure? He was then twelve years of age and would probably have been in the habit of travelling with other boys of His own size. How natural that, as the caravan wound its way out of Jerusalem, His parents should have assumed that He was with them.

Jesus was, I feel sure, not the only boy who has been left behind in Jerusalem during the hectic departure from a festival.

The road went on dipping into green valleys and climbing into dead hills. There was a little village called Sinjil, a name which carries with it the memory of a crusader, Raymound de Saint Giles, Count of Toulouse.

## § 2

On the roads of Palestine, and on the hills, you see the good shepherd. He comes along at the head of his flock, generally carrying over his shoulders a lamb or an injured sheep.

He is a man burnt almost black by exposure to the sun. He wears the flowing Bedouin head-veil, the *keffiyeh*, bound with two black twisted cords known as the *agaal*. Beneath his robes he often wears a sheepskin coat with the fleece turned next to the body. He is one of the many characters who walk the roads of Palestine exactly as they must have done in the time of our Lord.

A most remarkable thing is the sympathy that exists between him and his flock. He never drives them as our own shepherds drive their sheep. He always walks at their head, leading them along the roads and over the hills to new pasture: and, as he goes, he sometimes talks to them in a loud sing-song voice, using a weird language unlike anything I have ever heard in my life. The first time I heard this sheep and goat language I was on the hills at the back of Jericho. A goat-herd had descended into a valley and was mounting the slope of an opposite hill when, turning round, he saw his goats had remained behind to devour a rich patch of scrub. Lifting his voice, he spoke to the goats in a language that Pan must have spoken on the mountains of Greece. It was uncanny because there was nothing human about it. The words were animal sounds arranged in a kind of order. No sooner had he spoken than an answering bleat shivered over the herd, and one or two of the animals turned their heads in his direction. But they did not obey him. The goat-herd then called out one word and gave a laughing kind of whinny. Immediately a goat with a bell round his neck

stopped eating and, leaving the herd, trotted down the hill, across the valley and up the opposite slopes. The man, accompanied by this animal, walked on and disappeared round a ledge of rock. Very soon a panic spread among the herd. They forgot to eat. They looked up for the shepherd. He was not to be seen. They became conscious that the leader with the bell at his neck was no longer with them. From the distance came the strange laughing call of the shepherd, and at the sound of it the entire herd stampeded into the hollow and leapt up the hill after him.

I would like to know what an English sheep-dog would make of the Palestine sheep, because our principle of droving is something that neither Arab shepherds nor their sheep-dogs understand. It is all done by word of mouth, and the sheep follow their shepherds like dogs. The Arab sheep-dog is used therefore not to drive sheep but to protect them against thieves and wild animals.

Early one morning I saw an extraordinary sight not far from Bethlehem. Two shepherds had evidently spent the night with their flocks in a cave. The sheep were all mixed together and the time had come for the shepherds to go in different directions. One of the shepherds stood some distance from the sheep and began to call. First one, then another, then four or five animals ran towards him; and so on until he had counted his whole flock.

More interesting than the sight of this was the knowledge that Jesus must have seen exactly the same sight and described it in His own words:

'He calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger they will not follow, but will flee before him: for they know not the voice of strangers. This parable spake Jesus unto them. . . . I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep and am known of mine.'

It is with a feeling of delight that one realises how many

things in the Gospels which one has regarded as figures of speech are literal descriptions of the things that were happening round Jesus and His disciples as they walked the roads of Palestine. The ordinary sights are so frequently mentioned by Jesus that I believe many of His sayings and parables were suggested by the things that were happening round Him. Whenever I read the Gospels now, I always imagine Him pointing out something, as He undoubtedly pointed to a field of flowers when He said, 'Consider the lilies of the field,' and as He may have pointed to a shepherd calling his sheep together before He expounded the parable I have just quoted from St. John.

One reason why the sheep and the shepherd are on such familiar terms in the Holy Land is that sheep are kept chiefly for wool and milk, and therefore live longer and exist together as a flock for a considerable time. Also the shepherd spends his life with them. He is with them from their birth onwards, day and night, for even when they are driven into a cave or a sheepfold for the night, he never leaves them.

In the time of Jesus sheep must have been even more numerous than they are to-day. The Temple sacrifices demanded an incredible number of them. When Solomon dedicated the Temple he sacrificed a hundred and twenty thousand sheep. Enormous droves, destined to be offered on the altar, were always moving along the roads of ancient Palestine. The shepherds at Bethlehem during the birth of Christ were, no doubt, men keeping guard over a sacrificial flock from Migdal Eder, the 'watch tower of the flock'.

The species has not varied since the time of Moses. It is a peculiar type of sheep and I have never seen any other like it. Its distinctive feature is a broad, fat tail, or, more correctly, rump. This grows to such an enormous size that, I am told, it has often to be tied up along the sheep's back. I think Herodotus was the first writer to mention that sometimes the shepherds make little wheeled carts to carry these tails! I have never seen one and neither have residents in Palestine whom I have questioned.

The weight of these fat tails is, I believe, extraordinary.

I have read that some of them weigh twenty pounds and that a sheep weighing sixty pounds has been known to possess a tail weighing twenty. The fat is something between butter and lard, and the Bedouin regard it as a great delicacy. In this, as in their other habits, they faithfully reproduce the life of the Old Testament. The fat tail was included in the 'rump' that is mentioned in the Old Testament. In *Exodus* it is laid down that 'Thou shalt take of the ram the fat and the rump', and in *Leviticus* it is ordered that the officiating priest must take off 'the whole rump . . . hard by the backbone'. It was Jehovah's special delicacy.

There are two interesting references to sheep—or rather rams and lambs—in the Psalms:

'The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs.'

'The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars: yea, the Lord breaketh the cedars of Lebanon.

'He maketh them also to skip like a calf; Lebanon and Sirion like a young unicorn.'

I suppose nobody would take these references literally and imagine that these animals actually skipped, or that, if so, the skipping was anything more than the high spirits which are sometimes associated with lambs in spring-time, but rarely with the rams. But did the Israelites, I wonder, teach their flocks to skip and dance? If so, a new significance is given to the above verses. I ask this because I have come across a strange account of dancing sheep in an account written in 1745 by a missionary named Stephen Schultz.

He describes how he was entertained in a Bedouin camp on the Plain of Esdraelon and how the women set up a chorus of extemporaneous praise, as, in fact, they do to this day. Meanwhile, in compliment to the guests, the flocks were paraded under their several shepherds.

'Besides this shouting for joy in the women's tent,' wrote Schultz, 'the sheep are led through the men's tent. It was

done in the following manner: the shepherd went on in front and had a shepherd's pipe or flute, upon which he played, and the sheep followed him. As the shepherd modulated the tone when piping, by raising, lowering or letting it run fast or slowly, the sheep made the same movements, and as accurately as a French dancer would do whilst following a minuet. When one shepherd had passed in such a manner with his sheep, another followed with his flock; and so one after the other, during which progress the skipping of the lambs and he-goats drew special attention. Not all the shepherds had flutes, but some of them had other musical instruments.

'The dance of the sheep, he-goats and lambs being ended, the camels came. They, however, had not to dance through the hut, but round it. While this skipping of the animals was going on, the tongue-rattling of the women was often heard.'

Has this extraordinary custom died out completely or does it still linger, as so many Old Testament customs do, among the Bedouin in the remote desert? No one who has seen the authority exercised by the Arab shepherd over his flocks, or the obedience of the sheep to their shepherd, can doubt that this pretty trick could be possible.

No animal mentioned in the Bible can compare in symbolical interest with the sheep. I believe it is mentioned over five hundred times. And you cannot go very far along the roads in Palestine without encountering the figure who, staff in hand, symbolises the love and compassion of Jesus Christ.

### § 3

I travelled through a fiery land of hills to the lovely Vale of Shechem, where the ancient town of Nablus—the Shechem of *Genesis*—lies in a narrow defile between mountains.

The busy streets of Nablus are narrow dark tunnels crowded with camels, donkeys, and the vivid life of the East. The people are fanatical Moslems, and one recent guide

book tells you that it is unsafe to go about without a guide. I did not find it so. I admit that my appearance was not a signal for general rejoicing and that quite a number of people looked as though they would like to knife me; but that was merely their natural expression.

When I broke the ice, I found them exceedingly kind. For instance, I entered what I thought was an old crusading church to discover myself in an Arab soap factory. They were delighted to see me. They showed me how the soap was made, and when I left they showered cakes on me so that I emerged bulging all over with the stuff which, I discovered later, was absolutely devoid of lather.

But I had come to Nablus to see the strangest and the most ancient sect in the world—the Samaritans. These people have remained absolutely pure in blood for 2,500 years. They claim that they are the only true representatives of the ancient Children of Israel, and they hate the Jews to-day almost as much as they did in the time of Christ.

The anæmic relics of this once powerful race number only about one hundred and fifty. They have nothing in common with the twenty thousand Moslems among whom they live.

The Samaritans are a race apart. They are ruled by a High Priest, whose predecessor, centuries ago, was a rival to the High Priest of the Temple in Jerusalem, and they worship in a synagogue according to their ancient and peculiar laws. The only books of the Bible which they recognise are the five books of Moses, and their most treasured possession is an ancient copy of the Pentateuch written on lambskin by, so they claim, Aaron, the brother of Moses.

Every year the Samaritans sacrifice lambs on the top of their holy mountain, Gerizim. This extraordinary festival is carried out exactly as the Passover was carried out in Old Testament times. The entire community leaves its homes and camps out on the top of the mountain. On the eve of the Passover, as the full moon rises, the High Priest intones the prayers and the slayers draw their knives across the throats of the lambs—a disgusting, but historically

fascinating, ceremony, the last relic of the ritual of ancient Israel.

The tent doors are smeared with the blood. The lambs are then roasted and eaten: and the Samaritans gulp down the meat in large mouthfuls to simulate the haste with which the Israelites set out from Egypt.

It is a curious thing that, owing to Christ's parable about the Samaritan, the word 'good' has become attached to their name, and the term 'good Samaritan' is used every day to indicate anyone who is noble and self-sacrificing. Whereas the feeling among the Jews at the time of Christ was that a more violent and unpleasant people than the Samaritans never existed. These two peoples loathed each other and the dislike which the modern Samaritan professes for the Jew is a survival of the world's most ancient hatred.

This antipathy dates from the break-up of the Hebrew kingdoms. When Solomon died, civil war broke out, resulting in the division of the nation: ten tribes formed the Northern Kingdom of Israel, with a capital at Samaria; Judah and Benjamin formed the Southern Kingdom, with its capital at Jerusalem. The Assyrians defeated Israel and deported the ten northern tribes in 721 B.C.; the Babylonians sacked Jerusalem in 586 B.C. and carried Judah and Benjamin into exile. About fifty years later a proportion of Judah and Benjamin returned to Jerusalem (hence the word Jew), and began to rebuild the Temple. They found that, during the exile, Assyrian colonists had inter-married with the relics of the old northern tribes and now inhabited Samaria. The Jews rejected the friendship of this cross-bred race; and the ancient hatred began.

The Samaritan synagogue was in a poor part of the town, a little dark stone building, with rugs on a dais on which we sat in state while the famous Pentateuch was produced. This extraordinary manuscript is written in the ancient Samaritan characters on the hair side of ancient sheepskin. I was told that Aaron wrote it on skins of Passover lambs. I believe, however, that scholars give it a much later date; but, even so, its antiquity is very great.



It is kept in a silver box. The manuscript is in the form of a scroll, wound on two rollers. The parchment is so old and brittle that it crinkles up, and so brown that bits of it are illegible.

The casual way in which the Samaritans handled their treasure horrified me. Messrs. Maggs or Quaritch would probably have had a fit on the spot. I was allowed to hold the precious bundle, and then it was reinterred in its silver cylinder.

The Samaritans who crowded round the door of the synagogue were mostly pale, inbred people. They are all closely related to each other. The men, I was told, outnumber the women. If a man's wife is childless he is allowed to take a second one. There is also a rather unpleasant law which decrees that when a man dies his nearest relative, other than his brother, is bound to marry the widow.

They are probably the only Eastern people who, on account of the shortage of Samaritan women, prefer girl children to boys.

An interesting story has been handed down among the Samaritans for over twenty-two centuries. They say that when Alexander the Great conferred certain privileges on the Jews, the Samaritans, hoping to receive similar concessions, met him in state on the borders of Samaria and begged his sympathy. But it seems that they angered Alexander, in what way my informant was unable to explain. However, in punishment Alexander ordered that, in violation of the strict Moslem law against graven images, statues of himself were to be erected all over Samaria. To this the unhappy Samaritans were forced to agree.

Years afterwards Alexander, when making a progress through the country, looked for the statues but could not discover one of them. In a furious temper he visited Shechem and called for the High Priest.

'How is it,' asked Alexander, 'that my commands to the Samaritans are disregarded? Did I not tell you to erect statues of myself throughout Samaria? Why have you not done so?'

'But, my lord,' said the High Priest of the Samaritans, 'it has been done even as you commanded.'

'Show me my statues!' commanded Alexander.

The High Priest raised his voice and cried 'Alexander!' and there came running to him from all quarters little boys, all of the same age.

'We would not insult your fame, my lord,' explained the high priest, 'by making statues of dead stone in your honour. We have made you living statues.'

It appears that as soon as Alexander had issued his decree the Samaritans named all their male children Alexander. I do not know whether this story is true or not. It is just the sort of story that Josephus loved to tell, though it is not to be found in his works. I heard it from the lips of a man who knows the Samaritans and has made a study of their folk-lore.

#### § 4

As the road sweeps across the broad green Plain of Jezreel and climbs into the mountains on which Nazareth is enthroned, the visitor can think of nothing but the boyhood of Jesus. Every rock and every hill is important, for these things do not change and He must have known these rocks and these hills. Looking back, the great plain stretching to the sky and the outward thrust spur of Carmel to the west are intensely significant.

When the road straightens out at the top of the hill and runs towards the snow-white houses of Nazareth, towards the thousands of spear-like cypresses, the terraces of fig and olive trees, the town is exactly as one likes to imagine it. Even Bethlehem is not more satisfying to the eye. But, even while a stranger's car approaches, children hold out their hands greedily from the roadside, and the awful cry 'Baksheesh' comes down the wind. On arrival, there is a rush for the unfortunate victim.

Small waspish children crowd round, shouting 'Baksheesh' at the top of their voices, while various unpleasant persons

thrust out post cards, murmuring 'Pictures of the Virgin's Fountain, very cheap': and among those who run towards the stranger and pull him by the sleeve are old women with trays of lace, who leave in his hand cards which read: 'Dear friend! Will you kindly give this to shop or to a person who likes to deal with me in needlework, and thank you for your favour. Forget me not!'

It may be childish to be furious because one's picture of Nazareth is spoilt by a horde of noisy people, and because arrival in one of the few towns on earth which should be holy is made horrible by every kind of mean huckster trading on the sacredness of the place, and by touts who offer to take you 'to the house where Jesus lived' as touts offer to take you round the sights of Cairo. I don't think so. There are some places in this world which should be grave and quiet and lovely.

It is, however, not the fault of the poor children and the street traders. If they behave badly it is the fault of the tourists who swarm into Nazareth as people swarm into Stratford-on-Avon; and in exactly the same attitude of mind.

It is a pity that some holy places in Palestine are not on the top of precipitous mountains, with nothing but dangerous mule-tracks leading up to them.

One is shown all kinds of holy places in Nazareth, but perhaps the only one that really convinces is the Virgin's Fountain. This is, and ever has been, the only water supply of Nazareth. The stream gushes out of the mountain and runs through a conduit to a public fountain where women fill petrol tins with water all day long. The Greeks have built a church above the source of this spring and, when you go down into the darkness of this sanctuary, you can hear the water bubbling up from the rock. This must be the spring from which the Virgin Mary drew water.

Down in the narrow streets of the town I found a whole street of carpenters busily at work sawing wood, and using planes and chisels. These men, who work in archways open to the street, are mostly Christian Arabs, and a characteristic product of the trade is a wooden cradle on rockers which is

common all over Galilee. These cradles are always painted blue, a colour which is believed to ward off evil spirits.

As one stands among the wood shavings of these little shops in Nazareth, the old question: 'Did Jesus work at the carpenter's bench?' comes to one's mind. St. Mark calls Him 'the carpenter', but St. Matthew, 'the carpenter's son'. An attempt has often been made, by an examination of the similes used by Jesus, to prove that He was a practical carpenter during the years of His life of which we know nothing. But these references are too slender for anyone, except a Biblical critic, to found an opinion.

There are His sayings 'Cleave the wood and there you will find me'; 'If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry'; and there is the similitude of the mote and the beam. Surely to these we might add the parable of the house built upon sand?

I was interested to discover that the carpenters of modern Nazareth are of two kinds: the modern carpenter, who makes furniture and prepares wood for the builder, and the old-fashioned carpenter.

If Jesus did adopt the trade of Joseph, we must imagine Him working as the old-fashioned carpenters of Nazareth work to-day. The methods have not changed.

Their clients are the small farmers and the agricultural labourers of the district. They contract to make, and to keep in repair for a year, all the agricultural tools of a village. Payment is made in grain, so much for each yoke of oxen. At the end of the year the village carpenter goes round at threshing time to all his clients and draws his pay in barley, wheat, sesame or olives.

In the old days these carpenters had more work to do. They used to make doors and window-frames from the dwarf oaks of Bashan, a wood called by the Arabs, *Sündian*. But this branch of their work has been monopolised by the modern craftsmen, who can do much cheaper carpentry in Austrian wood.

I came to one dark little hovel in which a very old man, squatting on the floor among a pile of aromatic wood chips

and shavings, was using a primitive hand drill. Round about him were various yokes and ploughs and agricultural tools. He was the real old-fashioned carpenter of Palestine, a character who has existed unchanged since the invasion of the Israelites.

While I was exploring the street of the carpenters, I recalled a rather significant remark of Justin Martyr, who wrote that Jesus, 'when amongst men, worked as a carpenter, making ploughs and yokes, thus teaching the marks of righteousness and making an active life.'

There is an ancient and curious legend to the effect that the Emperor Julian, the apostate who tried to crush Christianity and bring back the pagan gods, once asked a Christian: 'What is the Carpenter doing now?' And the Christian answered, 'He is making a coffin.' The point of the anecdote is that Julian died soon afterwards.

There seem, among the early Christians, to have been some men who believed that Jesus practised the craft, and others who, piously considering that such humble work lowered His dignity, attempted to disguise the fact. But there can be little doubt that Joseph the Carpenter was exactly like the village carpenters in Galilee to-day, whose skill ministers to a whole village and whose reward comes at harvest time.

## CHAPTER SIX

*In which I go to the Sea of Galilee, stay in Tiberias, and go out fishing with men of Galilee.*

### § 1

GALILEE IS one of the sweetest words I know. Even were it possible to dissociate it from the Ministry of Jesus, it would still be a lovely word whose three syllables suggest the sound of lake water lapping a shore. It is as soft as the word Judæa is hard, as gentle as Judæa is cruel. It is not necessary to visit the Holy Land to appreciate the rocky harshness of 'Judæa' or to hear the water falling from the oars in 'Galilee.'

The meaning of the word Galilee is 'Ring, or Region, of the Gentiles.' The Hebrew word *Galil* means a circlet, or anything that is round. Chanctonbury Ring and the Links of Forth convey the same idea in English. The district was never entirely Jewish, even in the earliest times. Ten cities of Galilee were given by Solomon to Hiram, King of Tyre, as part payment for the building of the Temple, and the invasion of the Gentile population continued in later times. When Jesus went to live beside Galilee, the western shore of the lake was dotted with a ring of towns and fishing villages in which the non-Jewish element was very strong. The pure-blooded Orthodox Jew of Jerusalem looked down with contempt upon the Galilean and made fun of his dialect and of the way he pronounced the gutturals. Those who stood in the court of the High Priest's house after the arrest of Jesus detected that St. Peter was a follower of Christ. 'Thou art a Galilean,' they said, 'for thy speech bewrayeth thee.' Amusing errors in grammar and absurd mistakes due to mispronunciation were constantly cited by the superior Judæans as proof of the stupid, yokel character of the Galileans.

Now, when the time came for me to set out for the Sea of Galilee, I found myself almost nervously apprehensive.

Would it be cheapened by competitive piety, as many parts of Palestine have been cheapened? Would there be anything left to remind a man of Christ? I did not know. I was conscious only of the fact that Galilee must be the supreme adventure in any journey to the Holy Land. Above all places on the earth, it is the one most closely associated with Jesus Christ, and whenever the lovely word is spoken it calls up a picture of Him, not yet the Christ of whom St. Paul preached, but the Jesus of our inmost hearts who called little children to His knee and preached the gospel of love and compassion to the humble, the simple and the heavy laden.

## § 2

Some instinct warned me to stop on the hill that runs up into Nazareth. I looked back to the south over a sweep of country that recalls much of the sorrows and triumphs of a nation.

I saw the great Plain of Esdraelon stretching like a smooth, green sea to the distant hills of Samaria. The shadows of the clouds moved over it as if the ghosts of old armies were crossing the haunted plain. There are over twenty battlefields down there. The level arena has known the thunder of chariots from Egypt, Assyria and Babylon. Somewhere on the plain, Barak smote the Canaanites. From its green levels Gideon drove the Midianites towards the Jordan. On the hills at the back Saul went by night to consult the Witch of Endor, and by day saw his armies scattered and his sons slain. It was down there, too, that the dead body of Josiah was hurried from the triumphant Egyptians and borne in sorrow to Jerusalem.

The brown hills to the south, the hills of Samaria, had known the denunciatory figure of Elijah. They had heard his burning words and seen the prophetic fire in his eyes. On the skyline was the hill that held Naboth's Vineyard and the hill on which Jezebel met death. To the right the long calm ridge of Carmel cut the sky, and I looked at it

remembering the priests of Baal and the fire that Elijah drew down from heaven to confound them.

When I had looked my fill at this tremendous map of Old Testament history, I went on through Nazareth; and the road ran upward to the top of another hill. There I stopped, not from instinct but from amazement; for down below me to the northward lay a new world—Galilee.

I do not know the name of this hill, but I shall always think of it as the Hill of the Two Testaments. To the south lies the Old Testament; to the north lie Galilee and the New. As I looked northward to the new land, the idea came to me that this hill reproduces in nature the title-page which printers of the Bible place between the books of the prophets and the life of Christ. And I thought that although Jesus may not have visited all the places which are now called holy, there can be no doubt that He must have often stood on this hill as a boy. He must have known all His nation's ghosts, which crowd up from the south, and He must have looked with affection towards the calm and lovely north and the road that runs down over the mountains to the lake.

One pictures Him in imagination rising from the hill as the sun drops into the sea and going down through the hush of the twilight to Nazareth. Night is closing in on the Plain of Esdraelon and the hills of Samaria are already in shadow. But the last thing that fades from sight on the plain below is a white streak. It is the road that goes on through Samaria and through the wilderness of Judæa to end at last far to the south before the gates of Jerusalem.

As I went down into Galilee, I knew that I had learnt something about the Gospels that I could never have known in any other way. Nazareth is a frontier post between the north and the south. To go into Galilee is to turn one's back on the arena of the Old Testament, and there is something in the formation of the land that gives a feeling of finality to the act: one cannot possibly go into Galilee without the knowledge that one has definitely said farewell to Judæa. It is not until one crosses this Hill of the Two



Testaments that one's mind shakes itself free from the powerful hypnotism of Jerusalem.

By going into Galilee Jesus performed a symbolic act. He turned His back on the world of the Old Testament, and from the moment of that turning away the New Testament begins.

Everyone must feel how different are these two worlds. In the New Testament we seem to have emerged from a dark, fierce Eastern world into a clear light that is almost European. In fact Rome is already in sight. The centre of the Old Testament world is rigid, exclusive Jerusalem; the centre of the New Testament world is international Galilee, a country crossed in the time of Christ by the great military roads from the north and by the ancient caravan routes from the east, a country in which a man seen in the distance might be an imperial messenger riding to Cæsarea with tidings of the Emperor's death, or a tax-gatherer from the main road to Damascus, or a Greek architect on his way to build a new theatre in Jerash in the Decapolis.

This busy international corridor was the place in which Jesus taught. He alone of all the prophets who had come out of Israel deliberately cut Himself off from the theological stronghold of Judæa. And the roads He chose to tread were not the roads of the priests and the rabbis but the roads of the world. So in the road that runs over a hill from Nazareth to the Sea of Galilee a man detects the first promise of Christianity.

### § 3

In front of me the Sea of Galilee lay ruffled by a slight wind. It was not a uniform colour. There were patches of dark and light blue and also touches of pale green. I wondered with what lake I could compare it, and explored my memory in vain. The Emperor Titus intended to call the Lake of Neuchâtel, in Switzerland, Galilæa because it reminded him so much of the Sea of Galilee, but he must have changed his mind. The lake is heart-shaped, with the

narrowest part to the south. It is thirteen miles long and at its widest part about seven miles across. Loch Lomond is eleven miles longer than the Sea of Galilee, but it is nowhere as wide. Lough Neagh in Northern Ireland is five miles longer and four miles wider. Mountains rise all round the lake. On the western shore they are green mountains; on the eastern shore they are the brown barren precipices of the desert, part of the rocky barrier that rises east of the Jordan and marches south with the river, past the Dead Sea down to the Gulf of Akaba. When I looked to the north I saw the sight that impresses itself upon the mind of all who live in Galilee: I saw a magnificent ridge of mountain covered with snow. It stood up like a screen to the north. The snow never melts in its deepest corries even in the height of summer. It was Mount Hermon, the Mountain of the Transfiguration.

What makes it so impossible to compare the Sea of Galilee with any European lake is the sub-tropical climate. It is a little inland sea sunk at the beginning of the tropical trench that divides Palestine from Arabia. It is seven hundred feet below sea level and, like its companion lake, the Dead Sea, many miles due south, it belongs to a different latitude from the rest of Palestine. The mountains that rise all round it have their heads in a temperate climate and their feet in a lake round whose shores banana, palm, bamboo and sugarcane thrive. And the water of the Sea of Galilee is fresh, not salt and bitter like that of the Dead Sea.

The second thing that impresses one about the Sea of Galilee is its desolation. It is, with the exception of the white town of Tiberias, a deserted lake. Through glasses one can see, far off along the western bank towards the north, a dark clump of eucalyptus trees which are supposed to mark the site of Bethsaida, and next to them a small white building and more trees which stand where Capernaum is believed to have stood. You see uneasy mounds of black stones near the shore which are the dead bones of old cities. When you look at the pink and mauve hills opposite, you see that they are wild and desolate, slashed with brown thirsty valleys

as with the slashes of knives. Dotted about them here and there are little black squares, sometimes near the shore but more often higher on the hills. They are the goat-hair tents of Bedouin tribes. It is a wild desert country over there and is part of French Syria. There are few roads. Mud villages are mounted on the tops of mountains, and the traveller who ventures among them without a knowledge of the language is advised to take an armed escort with him.

But the Sea of Galilee, even in its desolation, breathes an exquisite peace and a beauty that surpass anything in Palestine. The landscape has altered in detail since Jesus made His home in Capernaum, but the broad outline has not changed. The hills are the hills He looked upon, the lights and shadows that turn the Gergesene heights to gold and purple, the little breezes that whip the lake into whiteness, the blue water that fades to a milky green where the Jordan enters at the north; none of these has changed. These are the things that Jesus looked upon and loved when He lived in Galilee.

I went into the streets of Tiberias. It is a shabby, squalid little town and crouches like a beggar on the lakeside. It is a town of rags and dark eyes and dark cellars, of little jumbled shops and narrow streets. The ruins of a fine crusading wall of black basalt, in whose bastions families live in unspeakable poverty, rise from the water's edge.

The Herodian ruins lie a little way to the south of the modern town. Only a few rubble walls exist to speak of the town that Herod built to minister to his summer palace on the hill. Part of the three-mile wall can still be traced, but stretches of it have fallen into the lake. The hill at the back is pitted and scarred with ruins. High up on its slopes are mounds, shattered pillars and old masonry, which mark the site of the palace of Antipas. From the side of this hill I picked out all kinds of Roman pottery and small fragments of iridescent glass.

One relic of Roman times is still alive. From a hill near the lake gushes a stream of hot mineral water. This spring,

which is claimed to give the same water as that of Carlsbad, and was mentioned by Pliny, was known and valued in the earliest times. No doubt Vespasian and Titus bathed in it when they carried the war into Galilee. And it is still healing the woes of humanity. I visited a large bathing house to which patients come from all parts of Syria, Palestine and Trans-Jordan.

In the time of Jesus these baths attracted the sick from every part of the country. One cannot help marvelling at the number of sick people who were brought to the lakeside to be cured by Jesus. At times they came to Him, not singly but in great companies. Now, Capernaum was only ten miles along the shore from the hot baths at Tiberias. One imagines that the presence of the most famous spa in the country, and the gathering there of many hundreds of invalids, must have been responsible for many of the crowds who sought our Lord's help in Capernaum.

I went down to the lakeside as the sun was setting. The houses and other buildings come right down to the edge of the water, but there is a small clear space occupied by a wooden jetty from which the few fishing-boats put out in the evening. This primitive jetty is probably the descendant of the splendid harbour from whose steps the barges of Herod once set sail over the blue waters. A few Arabs sat in the dust. Three boatmen were getting their craft ready for a night's fishing.

#### § 4

I went down to the little jetty one morning and arranged to go for a day's fishing.

The boat was a large, clumsy affair manned by four fishermen who took it in turns to row with oars as thick as cartshafts. There was a sail lying in the bottom of the boat, ready to go up in the unlikely event of a breeze. So we set off in burning sunlight over a still, blue lake.

About sixty men earn their living on the Sea of Galilee by following the trade of St. Peter. They are all Arabs and are

mostly Moslems. The fishing nets used on the lake are of three kinds: the hand-net, or *shabakeh*; the draw-net, or *jarf*; and the floating-net, or *m'batten*. The first two are the most popular. The hand-net is used all over the lake, but the draw-net is employed chiefly in the Jordan estuary at the north end.

While two of the fishermen rowed, the other two sat in the boat preparing their nets. These were circular and of very fine mesh, weighed down on the outer edge with dozens of small leaden weights. They are flung by hand and are evidently the same kind as those mentioned in the Gospels. The disciples, when first called by Jesus, were 'casting' their nets.

The youngest of the fishermen spoke quite fair English, and from him I learnt that fishing on the Lake of Galilee is not a very profitable business.

'We go out all night and catch our fish,' he said, 'but in the morning we get only a few piastres for them. But the merchant, he get many, many piastres. . . .'

And my mind sped northwards, far from the sunny waters of Galilee, to the cold North Sea and to the pilchard fleet of Cornwall, where so often I have heard the same grouse against the middle man; it is the eternal lay of the fisherman.

There was not a breath of wind. The sky was blue. But Abdul, the young fisherman, sniffed the air and, looking to the south, said that a storm was coming. This is, and always has been, one of the peculiarities of the Lake of Galilee. Sudden storms swoop swiftly over this low-lying sheet of water, whipping the surface of the lake with fury and covering it with waves that frequently swamp the small rowing-boats. The reason is that winds from the west passing over the highlands come swirling down through a hundred gorges and narrow valleys into the deep pit in which the lake lies. The water is smooth one moment and the next it is a raging sea in which men battle for life. Three men had recently been drowned in such a storm, said Abdul, and their bodies had not yet been recovered.

It was one of these storms that is described so vividly in the Gospels:

'And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, inso-much that the ship was covered with the waves: but He was asleep.

'And His disciples came to Him, and awoke Him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish.

'And He saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then He arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.'

How lovely it was on this hot morning, the shores receding, no sound but the creak of the huge oars, the splash of the water and the little Arab songs that one of the men would sing, softly humming a verse that would lead to a shouted chorus.

We made for the opposite bank, where the hills of Gergesa seemed even more terrible and inhospitable as we drew nearer. They looked as they must have looked in the time of Christ: thirsty, burnt-up hills scored with thousands of thin slashes, the marks of dried-up torrents, and invaded by dark gullies in which no man would venture unarmed.

How faithfully the Gospels paint the characteristics of this country. Even to-day, after a lapse of nearly two thousand years, this country of the Gergesenes is the place in which one would expect to meet a madman.

It was from one of those fearful precipices that the Gadarene swine stampeded into the lake. Has it ever occurred to you to wonder why swine, an unholy beast to the Jew, should have been feeding round the Sea of Galilee? Tucked away in these hills are the ruins of Greek cities which flourished in the time of Jesus, the cities of the Greek-speaking Decapolis. And they had no prejudice against pork.

We jumped ashore and clambered over the hot rocks. There were three or four Bedouin tents pitched near by. The Bedouin were poor, hungry-looking people. The whole tribe turned to look at us, staring with the uncompromising intensity of animals.

A few minutes' walk from the encampment brought us to a wild little valley in which a few strips of barley were

growing. Here we saw a Bedouin crouched on the ground, eating grass.

'He is hungry,' commented Abdul, 'and has nothing else to eat.'

'But the lake is full of fish,' I said. 'Why doesn't he catch some?'

This seemed to puzzle Abdul. He shrugged his shoulders.

'The Bedouin do not catch fish,' he said.

The sight of the man's poverty depressed me so much that I performed the usual act of a sympathetic European and gave him a shilling. But in order to buy anything with it he would have to cross the lake to Tiberias, or walk about thirty miles into the mountains!

Poor Nebuchadnezzar! He looked at the coin in his palm and thanked me; then, with the innate politeness of the desert Arab, he bent down and swiftly plucked some long blades of grass, which he pressed into my hands. It was all he had to offer.

We rowed off again and beached the boat in a desolate little bay. One of the fishermen girded his garments to the waist and waded into the lake with his nets draped over his left arm. He stood waiting, as if watching for a movement in the water. Then, with a swift over-arm motion, he cast the hand-net. It shot through the air and descended on the water like a ballet dancer's skirt when she sinks to the ground. The dozens of little lead weights carried the bell-shaped net through the water, imprisoning any fish within its area.

But time after time the net came up empty. It was a beautiful sight to see him casting. Each time the neatly folded net belled out in the air and fell so precisely on the water that the small lead weights hit the lake at the same moment, making a thin circular splash.

While he was waiting for another cast, Abdul shouted to him from the bank to fling to the left, which he instantly did. This time he was successful. He waded out and felt round with his feet. Then he drew up the net and we could see fish struggling in it. I was interested in this, because the

fishermen were unconsciously repeating one of the most wonderful incidents in the Gospels.

Jesus appeared to seven disciples after the Resurrection. He stood on the shores of the lake at dawn and cried:

'Children, have ye any meat?'

They answered Him, 'No.'

'Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find,' He said.

They cast as Jesus had directed and 'drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken.'

No one unfamiliar with the fishermen and the fishing customs of the Lake of Galilee could have written the twenty-first chapter of St. John's Gospel. It happens very often that the man with the hand-net must rely on the advice of someone on shore, who tells him to cast either to the left or right, because in the clear water he can often see a shoal of fish invisible to the man in the water.

Time and again these Galilean fishers are in the habit of casting and getting nothing; but a sudden cast may fall over a shoal and they will be forced to 'draw the net to land'—as St. John says so exactly—and their first anxiety is always to discover if the net has been torn.

St. John, in describing the miracle, makes the amazingly matter-of-fact statement that 'yet was not the net broken'. Who but a fisherman, or one intimately acquainted with them, would dream of mentioning this at such a moment?

The fish we caught were *musht*, or comb-fish. This is the characteristic fish of the Lake of Galilee. It is a flat fish about six inches long, with an enormous head and a comb-like spine that stands up along its back. It is also called St. Peter's Fish, for legend says that it was from the mouth of this fish that Peter took the tribute money.

I sat with a pile of these strange fish before me and remembered the incident as described by St. Matthew. Jesus and Peter arrived in Capernaum together after the Transfiguration on the slopes of Mount Hermon. One of the gatherers of the Temple Tribute came to demand payment



of the half-shekel, levied on every male Jew of religious age, which was devoted to the enormous expenses of the daily sacrifice and other offices in the Temple at Jerusalem. Jesus and Peter were evidently without money, and Jesus said to Peter:

‘Go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: take that and give unto them for me and thee.’

Just out of curiosity I opened the mouth of a *musht* and placed a ten-piastre piece inside it. This is the same size as an English two-shilling piece. The coin went in easily, for the mouth of this fish is out of all proportion to its size. The male *musht* has the peculiar habit of carrying the spawn about in his huge mouth, and when the young fish hatch they use the parent’s mouth as a nursery and a place of safety in time of danger. As the young fish grow, the mouth of the parent fish becomes so distended that it is difficult to understand how he can feed himself.

But to return to the fishermen. No sooner were the fish dead than one of the men built a little fire of twigs. Another made three slashes with a knife on the backs of the fish and roasted them on the fire. Abdul ran to the boat and brought back with him two or three ‘loaves’, or rather flat cakes of Arab bread, thin, brittle stuff like an overdone pancake.

One of the fish was taken from the fire, placed on a cake of bread and given to me. I pulled it apart with my fingers; and it was very good.

Once again, these fishermen were re-enacting one of the most solemn and beautiful episodes in the Gospel of St. John. It was in this way—the way the Galilean fishermen always eat when out fishing—that Christ, risen from the grave, commanded the seven disciples to cook the miraculous draught of fishes.

He stood on the shore in the greyness of dawn. At first they did not know Him. When He told them to cast their

nets, they obeyed, thinking that He was a fellow fisherman on the bank who had seen a sudden shoal of *musht*. But when they came nearer St. John whispered: 'It is the Lord.'

'Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him (for he was naked) and did cast himself into the sea. And the other disciples came in a little ship; (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits) dragging the net with fishes. As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread. Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught.'

I have seen many things in Palestine which have not changed since Bible days, but nowhere else have I met modern men acting quite unconsciously a sacred chapter of the Gospels. The fishermen of Galilee may be Arabs and Moslems, but their habits, their method of work, and the tools of their craft are the same as in the days of Peter, of Andrew and of Philip.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

*I discover the ruined church of the Loaves and Fishes, and try to reconstruct the life of the lake-side as Jesus knew it.*

### § 1

I WENT to see the ruins of the Church of the Loaves and Fishes.

No one knows when this church was built. It was probably erected in late Roman times and rebuilt. All that is left is the pavement and the stumps of a few pillars. The old Bedouin who guards the precious relic took up a broom and swept away the covering of earth, and with each sweep exquisite little pictures flashed into the sunlight. The floor was formed of small, delicately tinted mosaics in which blue and green predominated. The artist, whoever he was, knew and loved the bird life of the Sea of Galilee and rendered it in his little coloured stones in a most affectionate way. The pavement is divided into a number of squares about the size of an average carpet, and each square is a design of decorative birds and animals, but so lovingly done, and with a sly sense of humour too, that one can imagine the creator of this pavement hiding in the lakeside reeds, smiling to himself as he watched the often absurd movements of ducks and cranes and the self-assured twittering little birds that hung to the rushes.

I liked his picture of an extraordinarily smug goose pulling a lotus flower. There was another spirited picture, a fight between a heron and a serpent. There were also plump quail. And I admired the astonishing skill he showed in capturing, in what one would imagine to be an intractable material, that sudden moment when a water-fowl stands up in the water and flaps its wings once or twice, like a man yawning and stretching his arms. It is just a flash, and is gone. But this man who centuries ago watched the water-fowl on the Sea of Galilee has managed to pin down this

moment in his little tinted stones, for among his triumphs is a bird rather like a crane that is about to flap and stretch, chest out, tail up, and one wing just slightly higher than the other.

The only four-legged animals in the designs of this great but unknown artist is a funny little fellow rather like a rabbit. There is a red ribbon round his neck. I like to think that this was the artist's pet, for a man who observed Nature so accurately and so humorously must have loved animals. I also like to think that he put this little creature into his design in the confident hope that it would please God.

The central theme of the mosaic is a basket containing loaves of bread on each side of which is a fish.

There was something appealing about this pavement because, I suppose, unlike the usual relics of antiquity, a broken pillar or the plinth of a column, it had come out of its grave with a message that conquered time and language. If a voice had suddenly spoken to us from the earth, saying, 'I think the wild duck on the lake are very amusing, don't you? Have you noticed how they turn upside down? And have you observed their expressions when they bob up again? Then the fatness of quails and the thinness of storks, how amusing they are!'—if, as I say, a voice had spoken to us in those words, we could not have felt nearer to the artist.

The Miracle of the Feeding of the Five Thousand did not, of course, take place on this side of the lake at all, but the little church must have been a memorial to it.

Standing on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, it is easy to visualise the details of this miracle. News had just been brought to Jesus that Herod Antipas had murdered John the Baptist in order to gratify the injured vanity of Herodias. Our Lord is advised, or perhaps He considers it wise, to withdraw from the territory of Antipas. In order to do so it was necessary only to cross the lake, for the desert mountains of the eastern shore were in the tetrarchy of Philip. Accordingly, says St. Matthew, 'he departed thence by ship into a desert place apart.' In other words, He crossed over to the deserted eastern banks of the lake.

Now, while the little boat was crossing the six or seven miles of water, a great multitude carrying their sick with them 'followed him on foot out of the cities.' When you know the shape of the Sea of Galilee, this incident becomes very vivid. Evidently the crowds had converged, as usual, on Capernaum, but when they discovered that the Master had gone, they looked over the water to follow the direction of His boat. They saw with joy that He was going only to the opposite shore, probably to the little fishing port of Bethsaida Julias at the inlet of the Jordan. This meant that if they lost no time and, racing round the northern end of the lake, waded over the shallow Jordan, they would reach Bethsaida Julias almost as soon as Jesus. We can therefore place the Miracle of the Feeding of the Five Thousand more or less accurately as happening on the brown hills nearly opposite Capernaum, for if Jesus had taken a southerly course down the lake the multitudes could not have caught up with Him on foot, and in fact would not have attempted to do so.

As Jesus crossed the water He would see this great race of over five thousand round the north end of the lake, and He would know that whatever thoughts He may have had, of praying in a desert place apart and of meditation on the death of the Forerunner, were fated to be given up in service to the crowds. No sooner had He landed than the crowds came to Him, and we learn that He 'was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd'.

With the approach of sunset and the swift coming of night the disciples became anxious for the multitude, hungry and in a desert place. They advised Jesus to disband them and send them home.

'Give ye them to eat,' answered Jesus.

They returned to say that only five loaves and two fishes could be found. St. John, whose account of the miracle is remarkable and detailed, says that the loaves and fishes belonged to a boy. The exact words are: 'There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?'

Commentators have imagined that this lad was one of the bread boys who are still to be seen in Arab towns, sometimes with strips of dried fish which they sell with the bread.

'And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would. When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.'

There is one point in St. John's account of the miracle which is extremely interesting. In describing the fish eaten on this occasion he uses the Greek word *opsarion*, which our translators render as 'small fish'. St. John is the only evangelist to use this word, and the real meaning is not 'small fish' but 'a savoury dish' or, as we might say, hors d'œuvres. This is exactly what the small pickled fish of Galilee were in the time of Christ.

This is a wonderful instance of the vivid local colour which has been detected in the Fourth Gospel, because no one unacquainted with the life and speech of Galilee could have employed this word.

Again, so it seems to me, St. John conclusively proves his Galilean origin in his account of our Lord's appearance to the disciples in the dawn, when they are fishing near the shore. Who except a fisherman would have worried about the condition of his net at such a moment? The Master who had been crucified was standing in the greyness of the dawn, calling to them from the shore, but St. John says that when they drew the great haul of fish to land 'yet was not the net broken'.

It would never occur to a man of any other occupation, and certainly never to a student writing in a study, to note such a detail. But the Galilean fisherman who nets a heavy catch is always anxious about the net, because the bottom of the lake is covered with sharp stones for perhaps twenty or thirty feet before the sand begins. What a shouting goes up to-day as a heavy net is drawn out of the deep water towards the sharp stones, with what care the fishermen run thigh-deep into the lake to lift the precious burden clear of rocks!

In revealing details like this, and in the use of the word *opsarion*, St. John proclaims his origin. If one came across the word 'smokie' or 'ling' used as St. John uses the word *opsarion*, one would have very good reason to conclude that the writer was a Scot.

I have tried not to bore the reader with the learned scholastic battles that are waged round the Gospels, but I would like to suggest that, while it is perfectly simple to sit in a study and argue about Matthew, Mark and Luke, no man ought to presume to write about John until he has lived for some time in Galilee.

## § 2

In the time of Jesus the Sea of Galilee was one of the busiest centres of life in the country, and the western shore was ringed with towns and villages. The ruler of the province had his palace on the hill above Tiberias. The lake was crowded with ships.

One has always imagined that Jesus preached His Gospel to simple country-folk in a remote part of Palestine where no whisper of the outside world ever interrupted the immortal current of His thought. In actual fact His Ministry was conducted not only in the most cosmopolitan region in the country, but also in a territory where the ancient trade routes from Tyre and Sidon on the west, and the old caravan roads from Damascus on the north-east, as well as the great imperial highways, met together and branched out over the country. Galilee was on the main road of the ancient world, a half-way house between Damascus and the Egyptian frontier, on one hand, and between Antioch and Jerusalem on the other.

It was also a busy agricultural and industrial district. The hills round the lake, now so desolate, were planted with palms, olives, figs and vines. The fruits grown round the Sea of Galilee were famous in Biblical times. The trades carried on round the lake were boat-building, dyeing (at

Magdala), pottery works and fish curing. The large curing factory was at Tarichæa—the 'pickling place'—to the south of the lake, where fish were salted and packed for export.

There was always a big market for salt fish in Jerusalem. In Old Testament times the fish trade seems to have been in the hands of the Tyrians and the Egyptians. The 'Fish Gate' of ancient Jerusalem, round which the fish market was held, lay near the northern gate, the natural entrance from Tyre. It seems fairly certain, however, that about fifty years before the time of Christ the Greeks broke this monopoly by introducing the fish-curing industry to the Sea of Galilee. Pliny says that in his time the pickling place at Tarichæa gave its name to the whole lake, which suggests that the industry must have been at first a Greek enterprise. The trade must have expanded enormously, for we know that barrels of these cured fish were carried all over the Mediterranean world and that enormous quantities were sent to Jerusalem every spring for the Passover crowds on pilgrimage to the Temple. A Franciscan friar in Jerusalem told me a very curious legend about the Galilean fish trade. I paid little attention to it at the time, considering it to be merely one of the hundreds of ingenious theories that the traveller hears and forgets.

There is in one of the back streets of Jerusalem a dark little hovel, now, I believe, an Arab coffee-house, which contains stones and arches that were once part of an early Christian church. The Franciscan tradition is that this church was erected on the site of a house which had belonged to Zebedee, the father of St. John. This family, said the Franciscan, were fish merchants of Galilee, with a branch office in Jerusalem from which they used to supply, among others, the family of Caiaphas, the High Priest. Therefore, he said, this explains the otherwise mysterious reference in St. John's Gospel to the fact that he, St. John (who refers to himself anonymously as 'that other disciple'), gained admission to the house of the High Priest after the arrest of Jesus *because he was known to the doorkeeper*.

When one realises that disciples like St. John belonged,



no doubt, to prosperous trading families with points of contact in the capital, this tradition does not seem so extravagant. How otherwise, in fact, could the son of Zebedee, from Galilee, be known to the doorkeeper of the house of the most important man in Jerusalem? He might have been related, of course, but surely a much more likely explanation is that he was well known as a prominent local tradesman. If his father had a fish shop in Jerusalem, it is not extravagant to assume that he was known as the man who sometimes delivered the fish. If St. John worked in this way in Jerusalem, it helps to explain two of the most interesting characteristics of his Gospel: the detailed topographical knowledge both of his native Galilee and of Jerusalem.

I have already written of his intimate knowledge of fishing habits on the lake. But he is also quite at home in Jerusalem. He knows that the Kedron is a torrent that can be crossed on foot only in the dry season. He alone of the Evangelists mentions the name Gabbatha, the pavement in the Prætorium. He alone tells us that the multitude, acclaiming Christ as the Messiah, took branches of the *palm* trees that grew on the Mount of Olives. It is in these vivid touches that St. John proves that he was a native of Galilee who was intimately acquainted with Jerusalem.

In attempting to reconstruct the busy life of the Sea of Galilee as Jesus saw it, we must also remember that the hills, now so stark and bare, were at that time covered with trees. An intricate system of aqueducts, whose ruins are to be seen here and there (notably in some rocks at the back of the hospice at Tabgha), carried streams of fresh water wherever they were required. The climate must have been less fever-ridden than it is to-day. Possibly the wooded hills attracted a greater rainfall and also tempered the heat. One must think of this beautiful blue lake barred by a rampart of brown barren hills to the east, and ringed on the western shore with an almost unbroken chain of little towns lying at the foot of green hills thick with woods, bright with gardens, and loud with the music of running water. There would be the docks and harbour of Tarichæa, the long rows

of sheds, the sound of hammers as the coopers barrelled the fish, the noise of shipbuilders—possibly at Capernaum—the smoke and smell of the dye-works at Magdala, and the pottery kilns. On the hill behind the regal city of Tiberias rose the magnificent Herodian palace whose Greek sculptures shone in the sun from afar: well-built town walls met the lake-water and enclosed streets, villas, theatres, and an amphitheatre where Greeks, Romans and Sadducees applauded touring companies from Antioch, or watched gladiators whose names were famous throughout the Decapolis.

The lake as Jesus knew it must have been one of the busiest and most cosmopolitan districts of Palestine. Greek, Latin, and Aramaic were spoken in its towns. Its people were immersed in the affairs of the moment, and were, in fact, a part of that vivid, variegated world balanced between the East and the West: the world of the Gospels and the Early Church.

When Jesus walked the roads of Galilee He met the long caravans working southward across the fords of Jordan: He saw the sun gleam on the spears of Roman maniples and cohorts; He met bands of Phœnician merchants travelling into Galilee; encountered the litters and chariots of the great, and saw the bands of strolling players and jugglers and gladiators bound for the gay Greek cities of the Decapolis.

The shadow of this world falls across the pages of the New Testament. Jesus, walking the roads of Galilee, is walking the modern world, with its money-changers and its tax-collectors, its market-places and its unhappy rich men. When we think of Him beside the Sea of Galilee, we must not imagine Him as retired from the world, preaching His Gospel to a few faithful, simple souls: we must realise that He had chosen to live among people of many nations and upon one of the main highways of the Roman Empire.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

*The Passover, Easter, and the Feast of Nebi Musa occupy the attention of Jerusalem. I watch the black monks 'Search for the Body of Christ'. The city begins to wear an expression that was familiar to Pontius Pilate.*

### § 1

JERUSALEM WAS filled with the people of all nations. One heard French, German, Italian, English, Arabic, Yiddish and Hebrew in the course of one short walk through the streets. Drove of superior tourists who had come to gaze curiously on the rites of the Eastern Church were queerly mixed with humble Eastern Christians who firmly believed that the Holy Fire was soon to descend from heaven upon the Tomb of Christ. Opulent Jews from far away had come to eat the Passover in the City of David and Solomon. The Moslems were talking of the great pilgrimage to the tomb of Moses near Jericho.

The little booths near the Holy Sepulchre overflowed with incense and became festooned with the richest of candles. Large piles of shrouds appeared outside them on chairs. They were of the thinnest, cheapest linen and bore, printed in black, rough pictures of the Passion. I saw a peasant woman from, I think, Bulgaria, buy a shroud. Although they were all the same, she went from shop to shop examining them and fingering the miserable texture. It must have been force of habit.

In the dimness of Calvary a forest of candles burned; and all day long silent crowds knelt before the Tomb of Christ.

In the dark streets of the old city the Jews watched the moon of Nisan grow full, and went about their intricate preparations with an air of furtive secrecy. For the Passover was near.

A policeman, a young Scot, said to me: 'I don't think we shall have any trouble this year.' And he began to speak

about the annual contact of the three religions in terms of trunchions and sword-sticks. I thought what an extraordinary thing it is that, although the last Paschal lamb was slain on the altar of the Temple in A.D. 70 and the Temple has not one stone upon another, yet the turbulent Passover atmosphere which the Romans knew so well is still repeated in Jerusalem every year. The young policeman might have been one of Pilate's bodyguard.

## § 2

I had been invited to a house on the outskirts of Jerusalem to eat the Passover with a Jewish family. I was late because I had been given an insufficient address and wandered lost for some time in a solitude like that of Christmas night. The streets were deserted. I could hear cheerful festal sounds from the front rooms of houses, and once, through a badly drawn curtain, I saw a number of people sitting round a brilliantly lit table, the men with their caps on.

The moonlight was a green rain falling on everything. The shadows had a depth and softness that was exquisite to see, and on a piece of broken ground where someone was building a house I came across a solitary olive tree shining in the moonlight among piles of bricks and stones, its little leaves silvered all over as if covered with frost.

At last I found the house and was delighted to discover that I had not kept my hosts waiting. I was given a skull-cap and we went into the dining-room, where the grandfather of the assembly took his seat at the head of the table. He explained the setting of the table to me: the shankbone of lamb, the relic of the Paschal sacrifice, the roasted egg, symbolic of the daily Temple offering, the plate of *haroseth* made of apples, almonds, raisins, chopped cinnamon and wine, said to represent the clay from which the children of Israel made bricks, the bitter herbs and the dish of vinegar, symbolic of the years of bondage in Egypt. An extra cup of wine stood on the table. This was called 'the cup of Elijah'.

In Jewish tradition the prophet is a wandering angel who may enter any house unbidden on the night of the Passover.

The head of the house, reclining easily against a great pile of cushions, looked round on his children and grandchildren and began the ceremony that celebrates the escape of Israel from Egypt. All over the world this strange race, which has retained its sense of difference throughout the centuries, was performing exactly the same ceremony.

The sanctification, or *Kiddush*, was pronounced, after which we solemnly drank a glass of red wine and water. A maid-servant came round with a bowl and a jug. She poured water over our hands. Parsley dipped in vinegar was distributed. The head of the household broke the middle *matzah* cake on the dish before him and concealed half of it, leaving the other half covered with a napkin.

These words came into my mind: 'And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take eat: this is my body.'

Shining from the solemn ordinance of the Old Testament was the Holy Eucharist that on this night nineteen centuries ago, and within a mile of the place where we were sitting, had been instituted by the Priest who was also the Sacrifice.

The people at the table began to whisper together, asking who was the youngest. Presently a girl of about twenty stood up and asked her grandfather:

'Why is this night distinguished from all other nights?'

Then the old man repeated the ancient story of the Passover that has been kept green in the memory of Israel, and of the Jews, since Moses led the way out of Egypt. When he had ended, the first of the *Hallel* Psalms was sung:

'Blessed art Thou, O Eternal! who redeemeth Israel,' chanted the master of the house. 'Blessed art Thou, O Eternal, our God! King of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine.'

We lifted our glasses and drank the second cup of wine.

'Verily I say unto you,' said Christ at the Last Supper, 'I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God.'

Once more water was poured over our hands and the host gave to each of us a piece of the broken unleavened bread, which we ate with this blessing:

'Blessed art Thou, O Eternal, our God, King of the Universe, who bringeth forth bread from the earth. Blessed art Thou, O Eternal, our God, King of the Universe, who hath sanctified us with Thy commandments, and commanded us to eat unleavened bread.'

The host next took the bitter herbs, the green tops of horse-radish, and after dipping them in the *haroseth* gave some to each guest.

Again we ate unleavened bread, but this time with bitter herbs. Then followed an excellent dinner. At the end of it the host took the broken *matzah* cake and handed a small portion—called the *aficomán*—to each guest. He said grace and we drank the third cup of wine. The door of the house was flung open with this defiant appeal to God:

'Pour out Thy wrath upon the heathen that know Thee not, and upon the kingdoms that call not upon Thy name. They have devoured Jacob and laid waste his dwelling-place. Pour out upon them Thine indignation and let Thy wrathful anger overtake them. Pursue them in anger, and destroy them from the heavens of the Lord.'

The fourth cup of wine was then filled and, after the singing of the *Hallel*, was emptied.

I said good night to the kindly folk who had admitted me, a stranger and a Gentile, to this intimate glimpse of an ancient faith, and walked out again into the moonlit night. It was Dom Jean de Puniet who wrote in his book on the origin of the Mass that when Christ instituted the mystery of the Eucharist He was holding in one hand the chain of the old covenant which ended in Him, and in the other the first link of an unbroken chain reaching unto eternity.

## § 3

The Holy Week of the Eastern Church is marked by a number of ceremonies whose roots go back no man can say how far into the history of Christianity. They crowd one upon the other and are held all over Jerusalem in the churches of the various communities, so that it would be difficult to attend them all.

A friend who lives in Jerusalem offered to take me to the strangest of all the ceremonies of the Eastern Holy Week. It is held by the black monks of Abyssinia on the roof of the Holy Sepulchre.

As the moon was rising, a Greek monk let us into the church by a side door. It was pitch dark. We had to strike matches as we stumbled up over worn stairs to the roof of St. Helena's Chapel, where the black monks worship Christ under the stars. Long years ago, as I explained earlier in this book, the Abyssinians owned important shrines within the Sepulchre, but during centuries of struggle they were unable to hold out against more powerful Churches and so, bit by bit, they found themselves dislodged and driven from their sacred heritage. But, with a tenacity which has enabled these devout men to retain their faith since the fourth century, they sought refuge on the roof.

Lacking a church large enough to hold a big ceremony, they erect a tent in which once every year they celebrate a curious rite known as 'Searching for the Body of Christ'. This was the ceremony we had come to witness.

We found ourselves in bright starlight. The white domes gave to the roof the appropriate appearance of an African village. A long, brocade tent like a marquee had been set up in one corner, the flaps at one end looped up so that we could see inside, where, in a warm glow of candlelight, sat a barbaric assembly of Abyssinians dressed in gorgeous robes, with spiked gold crowns upon their heads. These were the cross-bearers.

A black monk led us to a row of cane-bottomed chairs at the end of the tent. Here we sat for a long time, watching

the grave, dignified row of Abyssinians in their splendid vestments. They looked like pictures of the Magi.

After perhaps half an hour we heard the discordant African chanting and into the tent came the monks, leading the Abouna, or abbot, to his place.

On the ground in front of him sat two monks with large silver-rimmed drums which they played with a quick hand-slapping motion, while the others shook sistra, filling the tent with an extraordinary shivering sound like the noise of shaken coins.

The sistrum is a metal frame with horizontal rods placed through it; these jingle when the frame is shaken. It was used in ancient Egypt in the temples of Isis to attract the attention of the worshippers and also to banish evil spirits. I did not know that there was a religious community in the world which still uses the sistrum in its services, and the shape of the instrument used by the black monks was exactly the same as the sistra of antiquity, which are discovered in the tombs of ancient Egypt.

The tapping of the drums, the shivering note of the sistra, and the raucous chanting of the monks, made it difficult to believe that one was attending a Christian ceremony on the roof of the Holy Sepulchre.

There was something impressive in the sight of these black men worshipping Jesus Christ with a ritual so old that it has borrowed something from the ceremonies of ancient Israel and ancient Egypt.

Nothing could illustrate more vividly the many religious customs housed in the Holy Sepulchre. Beliefs and customs long obsolete in the Churches of the West persist round the Tomb of Christ. There is an echo of the language of the Pharaohs when the Copts say Mass, and the liturgical language of the Syrians is something like the Aramaic which Christ spoke: compared to these, the New Testament Greek used by the Orthodox Church is almost a modern tongue.

A plaintive note crept into the Abyssinian service. My friend whispered to me that the black monks were bewailing the death of Christ. The drum taps became slower and the



notes of the sistra grew faint. The Gospels printed in the ancient Gheez, the literary language of Ethiopia, were brought to the abbot and, while the monks swung a cloud of incense towards him, he intoned the story of the Lord's Passion.

Then the tom-toms, which had formed a low, throbbing background to the service, became quicker and louder and, with the gorgeous crowned cross-bearers leading, we formed up two by two, and, candles in hand, went out into the light of the full moon to search for the Body of Christ.

This rite is really a simple dramatisation of the Resurrection. The abbot had read the Gospel story up to the point where the three Marys had gone to the rock-hewn tomb early in the morning with sweet spices to anoint the dead body of the Saviour. There they saw a young man sitting clothed in a white garment, and he told them that Christ was risen. . . .

And now the black monks took up the story and acted it. With a queer side-long, dancing shuffle they gyrated round the roof in the moonlight, crying that the tomb was empty, wailing because Jesus was dead, pretending to search for His Body in the dark shadows of the roof. Each monk held a lighted candle and the abbot walked under a green and gold umbrella.

The full moon was up, shining over Jerusalem, striking shivers of green and red light from the jewelled crowns of the cross-bearers. And so the fantastic assembly moved in a weird ritual dance to the sound of tom-toms and sistra.

Four times we circled the roof of St. Helena's Chapel. The plaintive chanting, dirge-like and inexpressibly mournful, went on, the African drums throbbed and the black abbot, surrounded by black monks, walked under his state umbrella making the sign of the cross in the moonlight.

When I looked behind me I saw the monks wailing in their sorrow, the moonlight turning them into grotesque figures from some savage African swamp, but in the nearer glow of the candles which they held, their mild black faces expressed every shade of devout emotion.

On the fourth time round the roof the tom-toms ceased, but the sistra continued to vibrate. The wailing went on and on. I remembered the words of the angels to Mary Magdalene:

‘Woman, why weepest thou?’

‘She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him.’

These black men, performing their ancient rite on the roof of Christ’s tomb, were expressing in their own outwardly barbaric way the sorrow of all Christianity in the death of Jesus Christ.

Suddenly the wailing stopped. In silence the black monks re-entered the tent and grouped themselves round the abbot. We slipped quietly away.

‘They will remain sad until the morning,’ whispered my friend. ‘Then they will celebrate the Resurrection and will become as happy as they are now miserable.’

We found the dark staircase and went through the silent Church of the Holy Sepulchre out into the sleeping streets of Jerusalem.

#### § 4

I joined the crowds one morning near the Jaffa Gate to watch the Hebron pilgrims march through Jerusalem during the Feast of Nebi Musa. This Moslem festival always coincides with the Holy Week of the Eastern Church. Devout pilgrims, accompanied by a number of fanatical dervishes, march through Jerusalem and, with sacred banners waving, go down to the Dead Sea to pay homage at a white-domed shrine which they believe to be the tomb of Moses. They camp out there for a week and then return to their villages. The history of this feast is curious.

The Moslems relate a legend that Moses, becoming lonely in his grave, complained to God, who promised him an annual pilgrimage. Another story is that, although Moses was one hundred and twenty years old, God told him that he should never die until he willingly stepped into the

grave. Whereupon Moses began to tread softly in case he should step into a grave by mistake. One day, however, tired and hot, he came over the Mountains of Moab, where he saw four workmen who had made a deep cutting in the rock. He asked what they were doing and they told him that they had made a hiding-place for a king's treasure. Moses, thinking that the cave looked cool and pleasant, entered and lay down on a ledge of rock. The workmen offered him a fruit of beautiful colour and of exquisite fragrance, but no sooner had he placed it to his lips than a deep sleep came over him. The four workmen, who were angels in disguise, then carried his soul into heaven.

The real history of the tomb of Moses is, I regret to say, not so picturesque. It appears that long ago the Turkish Government, alarmed by the enormous Christian crowds who flocked to the Holy Fire, determined to have an equal body of Moslems in the neighbourhood during the same period. Therefore the hitherto humble shrine of some obscure holy man near the Dead Sea was promoted into the tomb of Moses, and an annual pilgrimage organised to it.

The sun beat down on a crowd that pulsed and hummed with vitality. Hundreds of women, their faces hidden to the eyes in veils, lined the road and sat on walls, waiting. Peasants from all parts of the country wore vivid festival costumes. Lemonade sellers strolled through the crowd clapping their brass cups together and praising the coolness and the sweetness of the liquids. Men bearing trays of almond sweets, others with lettuces and some with coloured eggs, moved busily here and there; and from the distance came the throbbing of drums and beating of cymbals.

Slowly, and with but little organisation, the head of the procession came into sight. The leaders bore the sacred flags of silk, tasselled and embroidered and decorated with handkerchiefs tied to the poles, the votive-offering of village women. Each flag was carried by a member of a family whose cherished privilege it is to do so. Any attempt to interfere with this right would lead to instant bloodshed.

There was a flash of swords in the sunlight. The straggling procession halted. A ring was formed round two men armed with swords and bucklers. They executed a movement, half dance and half fight, hitting their bucklers by agreement, one-two, one-two, just like actors in a Shakespearian duel. The crowds applauded loudly.

Then came groups of wild-haired fanatics who drugged their senses with a weird dance and a phrase known as the *Zikr*, or 'the mentioning'. It was a rhythmic repetition of the words 'Lâ illâlah illa llâh . . . lâ illâlah illa llâh . . . lâ illâlah illa llâh . . .'—'there is no God but God'. The effect of this repetition, and the shuffling dance that accompanied it, seemed to make them drunk. They sagged at the knees, wiped the sweat from their faces, tossed their wild hair, and all the time their lips moved in the 'mentioning' and their eyes were vague and trance-like.

There were other bands intent on a different kind of excitement. They were mounted on the shoulders of their friends and were rushed rapidly up and down a clear space in the procession, beating time with their hands or with sticks like choir-masters, and chanting something to which the crowd responded with enthusiasm. I asked a man next to me what they were saying.

'They are cursing the Zionists,' he replied. 'They are singing: "O Zionists, what right have you in this country? What have you in common with us? If you stay in this country you will all find graves."'

This gave me the clue to the whole procession. It was not an Arab procession at all! It was something from the Old Testament. This was the way the Hebrew fanatics danced and cried out against the Philistines and the Canaanites. The antics of dignified elderly Moslems, who came gyrating at the head of their villagers to the sound of timbrels and of hand-clapping, were surely those of David:

'And as the Ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal Saul's daughter looked through a window and saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord; and she despised him in her heart.'

It seemed to me that this procession of Nebi Musa preserved the atmosphere and the appearance of the crowds that came 'singing unto Zion' for the great festivals of the year. It was a crowd like this, a crowd of excited, turbulent peasants, that congested the streets of Jerusalem when Christ joined the pilgrimage at Passover time. It was a mob like this that cried 'Crucify Him!'

My eyes happened to stray from the crowds to the tall brown ramparts of David's Tower. High up there I saw two Seaforth Highlanders. They wore shrapnel helmets and marching order. Quietly and unobtrusively the last relic of Herod's palace had been fortified, just in case the narrow boundary line between religion and politics should be crossed, as it is so easily crossed when three religions hold festivals together in the inflammable atmosphere of the Holy City. The sentries looked down, pink-faced lads from Scotland with broad smiles on their faces, just as Pilate's troops must have gazed down on the turbulent crowds of over nineteen hundred years ago.

And, by a strange irony of time, the pilgrims who danced and leapt like David and sang with the fury of the prophetic bands of Bible times, passed through Jerusalem calling down vengeance on the Zionists just as the ancestors of the Zionists had called down vengeance on the invading Romans.

## § 5

I have discovered a place not far from the Garden of Gethsemane, but higher up the Mount of Olives, where no one ever comes. A few olive trees grow among the rocks and the fiery earth is strewn with wild poppies. If you sit without moving, lizards much brighter than those which dart among the black basalt of Galilee will come and play about your feet. I like to get away from the rising excitement of Jerusalem, the babel of foreign tongues, the eager marshalling of the heated guides and the superficial judgment of the day tripper, and to walk

down through St. Stephen's Gate to the quiet open space opposite Jerusalem.

In the strange agglomeration of ignorance, cynicism, simple piety, sophistication, scholarship and stupidity which fills Jerusalem at this time, I seem to see a clear reflection of the Jerusalem of Christ.

If I could paint, I think that as I sit under the olives, looking at Jerusalem, I could put down on canvas the very city that Jesus saw when He came up to the Passover to be crucified. It was filled with the same varied crowds: uncouth provincials, simple Galileans, curious interested Greeks, prosperous Jews from Alexandria (just like the wealthy Zionists from London and New York), sightseeing Romans, white-robed priests and Levites, smooth Sadducees, obvious Pharisees with broad fringes to their garments and large phylacteries on their brows, and Roman soldiers in their helmets and their chestnut-coloured tunics, spear in hand, aloof and alien as a Highland sentry.

It is not difficult to imagine the sights and sounds that surrounded Jesus as He came up for the great birthday feast of the Jews, the feast that commemorated the Exodus and drew all who could travel towards the Paschal communion at Jerusalem.

Its heralds were abroad in the land weeks beforehand. All the roads and bridges were repaired after the winter rains. Every sepulchre received its annual coat of whitening so that it shone in the sun, and thus lessened the risk of ceremonial defilement. Jesus, when He rebuked the scribes and Pharisees from the Temple mount, pointed to the rows upon rows of newly whitened sepulchres below Him on the slopes of the Mount of Olives and drew, as He so often did, a striking comparison with something visible going on around Him: 'Ye are like unto whited sepulchres,' He cried, drawing their attention to the shining tombs in their Passover whitewash, 'which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.' The sight of these whitened sepulchres was one of the characteristic signs that Passover was on the way.

Then in every little town and village throughout Judæa and Galilee appeared the *Shulchanim*, the money-changers, the collectors of the Temple tribute. They set up their booths and collected the half shekel (about one shilling and twopence) which every male Jew of religious age was forced to pay towards the upkeep of the Temple. They did very well for themselves because the tribute had to be paid in Sanctuary shekels, and the money in circulation included that of Tyre, Greece, Rome, Egypt and Persia. For every piece of foreign money changed by the *Shulchanim* a charge of a penny-halfpenny or twopence was made. The compulsory tribute was collected locally and sent up to the Treasury of the Temple. Anyone who refused to pay endangered his goods. And the annual sum collected for the Temple is said to have been about £75,000 of modern money. It went to defray the cost of the daily sacrifices offered on behalf of the nation (a cost which the Kings bore in times before the Exile in Babylon) and many other sacred observances.

When Jesus came through the excited countryside and climbed up to Jerusalem, we know that He went many times to the Mount of Olives to meditate and to mourn. He was mourning not for Jerusalem the city, but for Jerusalem the Sanctuary. He knew how debased and formalised the worship of God had become, how cynical and worldly were the priests, led by a High Priest who on great occasions officiated with silk gloves so that his hands should not be stained; men gorged with the riches of the world, in whose hearts observance had replaced faith.

What was this Temple like in the time of Christ? What happened there? What would we have seen above those white walls could we have gone with the Master in the dawn from the Garden of Gethsemane to the higher places of the Hill?

While it was still dark the Temple guards patrolled the gates and courts in twenty-four stations. Each station consisted of ten Levites, so that two hundred and forty watchers were on duty every night in the Temple of Herod. During

the night the 'Captain of the Temple' went his rounds and visited all the posts. The Romans divided the night into four watches, the Jews into three. Anyone standing on the Mount of Olives in the third Jewish watch would have seen the huge building wrapped in silence and darkness, the only light a red glow in the centre of the white terraces where the fire on the altar of burnt-offerings was kept alight day and night.

The priests who were selected to offer the daily morning sacrifice slept in a room in the inner court. In the third watch, while it was still dark, they would awaken and take a ceremonial bath to be in readiness for the casting of the lots. An official would come to them, still in the hours of darkness, and cast lots to decide on the priest who would remove the ash from the altar of burnt offering. This man, alone and with no light but that of the altar flames, would go out and wash his hands and feet in the brazen laver that stood before the altar. He did this by placing the right hand on the left foot and the left hand on the right foot. He then mounted the huge altar of unhewn stone with a silver chafing dish in his hand, into which he swept the ashes; and as he descended he would see in the renewed glow of firelight the other priests ascending with shovels and prongs to place fresh wood on the flames.

Then came the second casting. The president would range the priests before him and cast lots to decide:

who was to slaughter the victim;  
who was to sprinkle blood on the altar;  
who was to remove ashes from the altar of incense;  
who was to trim the lamps on the seven-branched candlestick;  
who was to carry the head of the sacrifice and a hind leg;  
who the two forelegs;  
who the tail and the other hind leg;  
who the breast and the neck;  
who the two sides;  
who the entrails;



who the offering of flour;  
who the baked-meat offering of the High Priest;  
who the wine and the drink offering.

When this had been decided the time had come to watch for the first hint of sunrise. One of the priests climbed to a pinnacle of the Temple and stood gazing towards the East in the greyness of the morning. The president and the priests waited below for his report. When his cry came down to them, 'The morning shineth already,' they would ask him, 'Is the sky lit up as far as Hebron?' and not until he had agreed would the daily sacrifice begin.

The sacrificial lamb, that had lived for four days in a special room in the Temple and had already been examined for any of the numerous blemishes that would unfit it for death, was led out and again examined by the light of torches. It was given a drink from a golden bowl. Ninety-three sacred utensils were brought from a room near by and the lamb was led to the altar. The forefeet and hindfeet of each side were tied together and the head was placed through a ring in the ground, the face turned to the west.

At this moment, as the first light of a new day began to pulse upward from behind the Mount of Olives, the signal was given to open the Temple gate. As the gate moved the priests lifted silver trumpets and uttered the three shrill calls that announced every morning to Jerusalem that the sacrifice was ready to be slain.

At the same moment, the two priests who had been chosen to attend to the altar of incense and the lamps ascended the steps of the Holy Place and entered to perform their duty. The opening of this gate was the signal for the sacrifice.

The priests gathered once more in the Hall of Polished Stones to cast lots for the one who should officiate at the altar of incense in the Holy Place. He had to be a priest who had never before performed this office, unless, of course, everyone present had done so. He then chose two assistants, and while on his way to the Holy Place struck a great gong

called the Magrephah at whose sound the vast Temple became alive with priests and Levites and ordinary worshippers gathering to pray. Meanwhile the three incense priests entered the Holy Place. One spread the coals on the golden altar. The other made ready the incense. They then withdrew, leaving the officiating priest waiting for the signal to burn the incense. It was, no doubt, at this impressive moment that Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, received his vision. 'His lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord,' says St. Luke. 'And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense.'

At this moment silence fell over the vast Temple. The worshippers 'fell down before the Lord'. Clouds of dense, sweet smoke rose from the Holy Place. Solemnly the priests gathered round the altar to place the portions of the burnt-offering in the flames. Then followed the two meat-offerings and the drink-offerings, and as the priest was bending forward to pour out the drink the Levites broke into the psalm of the day. At each pause in the music the priests blew twice on their silver trumpets and the worshippers prostrated themselves. As the flames licked the newly slain meat, burning brightly with the oil and the salt, the morning sacrifice in the Temple was over.

Day by day for centuries the same thing went on. Thousands of beasts and birds atoned for the sins of humanity at the altar of the Lord. Blood flowed in a never-ending stream, and the smell of the Temple was the stench of burning fat. In addition to the routine sacrifices, thousands of private individuals offered sheep, goats, and oxen. They brought forward their victims, placed their whole weight on them to symbolise the substitutive nature of the rite, and then slit their throats while the priests caught the blood. But that was all the Temple had to offer. It gave no spiritual direction. It was merely a sacred shambles. Isaiah sounded its death-knell centuries before the time of Christ: 'For what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to me, saith the

Lord,' he cried. 'I am full of burnt-offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs or of he-goats.' From that time the spiritual history of the Jew was locked up not in the Temple but in the synagogue. The Romans who thought that in destroying the Temple he was destroying Judaism was wrong, because Judaism was no longer there.

Much has been written about the attitude of our Lord to the Temple. We cannot doubt that while He revered the thing it stood for, He condemned the thing it had become. 'I will have mercy and not sacrifice,' He said. His opinion of the priesthood was well expressed in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, and one might perhaps read into His attack on the money-changers and the merchants in the Temple a deeper meaning than a dislike for the carrying on of business in a sacred place. Was it not also a protest against the whole financial system of the Temple?

But what was this system? The priests literally raked in the shekels and lived, quite as literally, on the fat of the land. The Temple Tribute, or poll-tax, was only one of the imposts levied on the Jews for the upkeep of the Temple. Offerings of a different nature embraced every conceivable thing.

The Temple must have been an enormous storehouse of every kind of food and produce. Its vaults were stacked with the very best that the country could grow. In them also were large gold deposits, for, like most temples in ancient times, it was a bank in the sense that it offered strong rooms and safe deposits for the wealthy.

It was this mighty institution which Christ entered with a whip in His hand. The market was a remarkable feature of the Temple. During the days before the Passover, it was at its busiest. It was a cattle market. It was a money market. It was also possible to buy the necessary food and drink offerings there.

The market was held under the arcades in the great Court of the Gentiles. It must have been exactly like any market in Damascus or Jerusalem or Cairo to-day: a tense mass of arguing, bargaining people. Many a poor peasant was well

fleeced there. We know that prices were artificially manœuvred and that on one occasion the cost of two pigeons was run up to the ridiculous price of a gold denar, or about fifteen shillings and threepence of modern money. Before night it had fallen, through the intervention of an honest man, to the normal charge of a quarter of a silver denar, or about eightpence.

When Jesus entered the Temple Market it must have been loud with the bleating of the sacrificial sheep in their pens, the lowing of cattle and the cooing of doves. Men must have been arguing loudly, laughing, trying to get the better of each other, and gazing with contempt on the poor pilgrim who offered no man a profit.

There is an interesting point about this market. There is reason to think that it was the property of Annas, who had been High Priest for many years. Edersheim says that there can be no doubt that this was the place known as 'the bazaars of the sons of Annas', and Josephus makes the significant remark that Annas, the son of the Annas of the New Testament, was 'a great hoarder-up of money'. If this was so, can we not see how Christ's attack was aimed not only at the prestige of the priests but at their pockets and the whole shabby financial system by which they had grown rich? One critic has even suggested that this was one of the main reasons for the arrest of Jesus.

It is, at any rate, certain that in cleansing the Temple Jesus delivered a blow at the vested interests of the aristocratic priesthood. His action was an invitation to all honest men; and the poor, patient multitudes, who were mercilessly squeezed to support one of the most numerous and best-nourished priesthoods in history, gave Him such support in his protest that even the Temple police, who usually corrected the slightest irregularity, did not dare to lay a finger on Him. 'And he taught daily in the temple,' says St. Luke. 'But the chief priests and the scribes and the chief of the people sought to destroy him. And could not find what they might do: for all the people were very attentive to hear him.'

So the Jewish authorities who had, before the Passover, already decided to arrest Him, put their heads together and instigated the plot that led to the Cross.

## § 6

The Jewish Passover was a happy, tumultuous feast. The excitability of the crowds which thronged Jerusalem at this annual birthday of the nation is clearly visible in the Gospel narrative.

During the Roman administration of Judæa, Passover week was the time when the Government, fearing riots and disturbances, marched additional troops into Jerusalem. That was why Pontius Pilate, the Governor, was in Jerusalem at the time of the Crucifixion instead of his usual headquarters at Cæsarea. He had a twofold duty to perform: he was there to take responsibility for military action, and his permission was necessary for the handing over of the vestments of the High Priest, which were kept under Roman lock and key in a stone room in the Castle of Antonia.

The feast drew enormous crowds to Jerusalem. Jews came not only from every part of Palestine, but from the great Jewish quarter of Alexandria, and even from Europe, to slay the Paschal lamb in the only place where the sacrifice could be offered: on the altar of the Temple of Herod. Gentiles from all lands also flocked to Jerusalem out of curiosity, because it was the great time to visit the city.

After the great slaughter was over the priests washed the blood from the Court, while the crowds went to their homes, their lodgings, and their tents to make ready for the feast. A spit of pomegranate wood was passed through the lamb. Not one bone had to be broken, and the animal had to be roasted in an earthenware oven and carefully watched in order to prevent any part of it touching the oven. If this happened, the part touched had to be cut away and destroyed.

We can imagine how the tremendous activity, the bustle, and the excitement of the afternoon was succeeded by a

Sabbath stillness as the sun fell and the pilgrims were busy with the preparation for their feast. The streets would be empty. Each householder would be at home arranging the final details. The smell of roasting meat would rise up over Jerusalem and spread even to the hills around. The last light of the sun would rest for a moment on the white marble of the Temple, touch the golden spikes on the Holy of Holies and vanish; and with darkness the oven fires on the Mount of Olives, where the Passover tents were pitched, would glow like rubies, a prophecy of the camp fires of Titus. Then, loud, imperious, and detached, the Roman trumpets from Antonia would ring across the silence to denote the changing of the guard. . . .

‘And in the evening he cometh with the twelve. . . .’

We can imagine, as darkness fell and before the large spring moon had lifted itself above the city, how Jesus and the Twelve came down from the Mount of Olives and entered Jerusalem by the Water Gate. They ascended the steep streets to the house of the Upper Room, and were shown up to the flat white roof where an awning, or a temporary roof, rose above them.

The greatest artists in the world have painted their conception of this scene. I suppose Leonardo da Vinci’s fresco in Milan is the most famous. But no artist has been able to escape from his own time and show the Last Supper as it must have been in the Upper Chamber of Ophel by the light of the Paschal moon. I remember a Titian, I think in the Escorial, in which the Last Supper is set in a palace, and another, a Tintoretto somewhere in Venice, where the surroundings are those of an Italian inn. The truth is, of course, that the scene was a simple Eastern meal. There would have been a low table with cushions round it in a U-shape, in order that the table could at a point in the Paschal meal be removed without disturbing the guests, and replaced at another point in the meal. In the old days it had been customary to eat the Passover staff in hand and dressed for a journey, symbolic of the flight from Egypt. In the time of Christ the Jews attended the feast in festal garments and ate

lounging on a divan in a free position, leaning on the left side, in order to symbolise freedom after bondage.

That Jesus and the Twelve reclined on cushions in this way is proved by the fact that John, who sat next to our Lord, was 'leaning on Jesus' bosom.' This would have been an ill-mannered and clumsy attitude if table and chairs had been used, but, if you have ever eaten an Eastern meal, you will know that it is quite usual to lean back towards one's neighbour to put a question.

The hush of a moonlit night wrapped itself about the House of the Last Supper. As the full moon rose, the light would have slanted in under the awning in green angles on the white stone. There would have been a lamp burning, a bright spark floating in olive oil, and beyond the stillness of the Upper Room the pinnacles and towers of Jerusalem would be seen lying against the stars like the city of a dream. And Jesus said: 'Take eat: this is my body . . . this is my blood of the new testament which is shed for many.'

'And when they had sung an hymn they went out into the Mount of Olives.'

Is there in all literature a greater feeling of stillness than in this chapter of the Gospels? The last week in the life of Jesus is, so it seems to me, an extraordinary contrast of noise and peace. At one moment the shouting of a crowd comes to us over nineteen centuries, loud, violent and terrible; and at the next a hush has fallen and Christ is walking with the Twelve over the Mount of Olives. There is something awesome in the description of Jesus before the Crucifixion. The evangelists did not strive after any effect. They were interested only in setting down the most important happenings in their lives in a few simple words, yet through the stark economy of their writing shines something beyond the power of words to describe. We get the impression, Dr. Sanday has said, 'that there is always a vaster consciousness waiting to break through.' Nowhere in the Gospels is this 'vaster consciousness' so evident as it is when Jesus Christ moves through hate and treachery and all the baser things and, founding His Church in gentleness and in love, walks in

a ghostly calm through moonlight to the Garden of Gethsemane.

## § 7

One night, when the full moon burned above Jerusalem, I went down past the Zion Gate and stood at the angle of the Temple wall, looking towards the Garden of Gethsemane. Every limestone path was clear and white on the dark mass of the hill. The thousands of whited sepulchres that lie in the heights and in the hollows gleamed in the moonlight like companies of sheeted ghosts. The lamps that sometimes shine amid the hovels of Siloam were all extinguished, and the whole Mount slept in the green downpour of the moon.

In ancient times the Jews called it the 'Mount of three lights', because the altar flames in the Temple lit it up at night, the first light of the sun appeared from its summit, and the olives that grew there made oil for the Temple lamps. To the Christian it suggests only one Light: 'Then spake Jesus again unto them saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.'

I noticed that low down on the slopes, just above the dark cleft of the brook Kedron, a shadow marked the place where the moonlight was falling through the olive trees in the Garden of Gethsemane. The little garden of the Franciscans looked inexpressibly lonely, a patch of shadow on the bare rocks. The moonlight was so bright that I could see the boundary wall round the trees.

It was on the night of the Passover long ago that our Lord said, 'Sit ye here while I go and pray,' and, taking Peter, James and John, He went a little way off in the shadow out of the brightness of the moon.

'My soul is exceeding sorrowful,' He said, 'even unto death; tarry ye here and watch with me.'

And He went still deeper into the shadow.

When He came back the three Apostles had fallen asleep:



'Peter,' He said. 'What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.'

He went into the shadow for a second time and prayed: 'If this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.'

And when He came back the second time the three were again asleep. Jesus went for a third time into the shadow, but when He came back this last time He looked down on the sleeping men and said:

'Sleep on now and take your rest.'

For His hour had come, and He stood waiting in the light.

The eight disciples who had been left near the entrance to the garden had seen lamps mounted on staves swinging against the darkness of the Temple mount. These lanterns descended into the valley of the Kedron and then advanced up the slight hill towards the garden. They recognised the tramp of the Roman soldiers, who wore sandals studded with nails. They heard the excited whispering of the Jews. Although the moon was full, the approaching men came swinging their lights so that they could see into all the caves and dark places.

Judas, after he had slipped away from the Upper Room, had gone to the priests and called for a guard. The priests must have approached Pilate, for at the head of the troops came the *chiliarch* of the Twelfth Legion, the officer commanding the Jerusalem cohort. The soldiers must have first gone to the house of the Last Supper and, finding that Jesus had left, had descended the steep streets of Ophel and crossed the Kedron, taking the same road that Jesus had taken a few hours before.

How else can one explain that strange and vivid incident in the Gospel of St. Mark, the incident of the young man who fled naked? Surely this could be no other than St. Mark himself, a young boy at the time. We can imagine how interested he would have been in the great Rabbi who had come to the Upper Room in his mother's house; how, when he was fast asleep that night, the tramp of the soldiers

and the knocking on the door would have awakened him, filling him with curiosity and fear. Slipping a linen cloth about him, he would have crept from the house and followed the bobbing lanterns down the hill. Perhaps his eager young mind was bent on giving an alarm, on telling Jesus that men with swords and staves had been asking for Him; or possibly he was merely filled with the normal curiosity of a boy. His young figure in its linen cloth shadowed Judas and the band, sometimes stepping out of the moonlight as they paused, sometimes running on clinging to the shadows. Unknown to anyone, he would have been watching outside the garden when Judas stepped forward and betrayed Christ. He would have seen and heard everything. He heard Judas say:

‘Hail, Master.’

He heard Jesus reply:

‘Judas, betrayest thou the son of man with a kiss?’

He heard the sudden tumult and saw the flash of steel in the moonlight as Peter struck at Malchus, the servant of the High Priest. He heard Jesus ask:

‘Whom seek ye?’

‘Jesus of Nazareth,’ they said.

‘I am he.’

And when the disciples, except Peter and John, had fled, the young man, leaving his hiding-place, would have followed Jesus and His captors as they went from the garden towards the dark ravine of the Kedron. It was then that the young eavesdropper was noticed by one of the soldiers, and St. Mark says:

‘And a certain young man followed with him, having a linen cloth cast about him, over his naked body; and they lay hold on him; but he left the linen cloth and fled naked.’

Who would have noticed this triviality during the arrest of Jesus except the man to whom it had happened?

It was perhaps three o’clock in the morning when the guards with their Prisoner arrived at the palace of the High

Priest, which stood on the slopes of the southern hill not far from the house of the Last Supper. As the gates were unlocked the Roman legionaries marched away towards their barracks in the Castle of Antonia, leaving Jesus in the hands of the High Priest's men. They passed through an outer courtyard and through a door into an inner court with a gallery round it leading to the main apartments.

On the high hills of Judæa it is always chilly at night in the month of Nisan, and the flames of a charcoal fire glowing in a brazier shone redly on the gallery. The servants who had been awakened, and those who had returned from the Garden of Gethsemane, discussed the arrest as they held their hands out and thrust their faces into the light.

The two disciples who followed the Master had become separated. John, who knew the servants of the house, had pressed his way with the guard into the inner court, and as he stood there among those round the fire, he looked for Peter but could not find him. He went to the locked outer gate and saw him 'standing at the door without'. He asked the maid-servant to let him in and Peter came silently into the courtyard, where the light of the fire was flickering round the gallery. He was cold, and he moved to the brazier.

The night was fading. The sky began to lose its deep blue, and already the first uneasy stirrings of dawn moved over the Mount of Olives.

In the audience chamber of the palace Jesus was standing before Caiaphas and a few members of the Sanhedrin who had been drawn from their beds to attend the private inquiry. There were false witnesses, spies who had been following the Master in the Temple, whispering with Judas, listening at keyholes. But even these wretches could not agree in infamy. Jesus stood in silence watching His foes.

'Answerest Thou nothing?' cried Caiaphas.

And Jesus held His peace.

Then Caiaphas saw the way to trap Him, and administered the solemn oath:

'I adjure Thee, by the living God, that Thou tell us whether Thou be the Christ, the Son of God!'

It was a command that no Jew could disobey:

'Thou hast said,' replied Jesus.

Then the High Priest, rising as ordained by the Law whenever blasphemy was uttered, took his priestly garments at the neck and rent inner and outer garment so that they could never be mended. The silence of death was over the room.

'Behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy: What think ye?'

From the circle of faces came the answer:

'He is guilty of death.'

Downstairs in the courtyard Peter was warming his hands at the brazier. It was now almost day. It was that grey time, the colour of a dove's wing, when there are no shadows. It was the time the stars die one by one. As Peter bent over the fire, the maid-servant who had let him in and the others who were warming their hands nudged each other and whispered:

'Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee!'

And Peter drew back and said quickly:

'I know not what thou sayest!'

Uneasily, angrily, he left the fire and moved away to the porch, but there another maid saw him:

'This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth,' she said.

'I do not know the man,' cried Peter.

'Surely thou also art one of them,' persisted those round the fire, 'for thy speech bewrayeth thee?'

'I know not the man!' he cried angrily a third time.

And immediately the cock crew. It was the only sound in the stillness of the dawn. It came from the gardens on the Mount of Olives. The sharp sound was like a knife in Peter's heart. As he turned in the agony of his self-abasement, his eyes were drawn upward to the gallery where a figure in the white festal garments of the Last Supper was standing, His wrists bound with cord. Our Lord turned and looked down at Peter. And Peter went out in the cold wind that blows before the morning, and saw the colour stealing back into the world and the sky behind the Mount

of Olives pulsing with the promise of a new day. And Peter wept.

## § 8

When Pontius Pilate came up to Jerusalem from Cæsarea on official visits it is almost certain that he did not live in the garrison quarters of the Castle of Antonia, but in the magnificent palace of Herod the Great. This palace, after the banishment of Herod's worthless heir, Archelaus, had become the property of the Roman State. In the same way the Roman Governors had at Cæsarea transformed the great Herodian palace fronting the sea into Government House.

Pilate was a privileged person. He was the nominee of Sejanus, the man behind the throne of Tiberius, and he was the husband of a member of the ruling house, Claudia Procula, who is said to have been a granddaughter of Augustus. It was probably this friendship with the imperial household which enabled him to set aside the rule which forbade Governors to take their wives with them into their provinces. The social life of Pilate was, therefore, not that of an ordinary Governor; and his wife, who had been brought up in the luxury of the Imperial Court, probably enjoyed the privilege of entertaining guests in the huge palaces which were at her disposal in Cæsarea, Jerusalem, and Samaria.

In his chief palace at Jerusalem Herod had indulged his passion for magnificence and his love of building. It was constructed in two colossal marble wings which stood among gardens high above the city. The great hall contained one hundred dining-couches, and the rooms, pavements and colonnades shone with the rarest marbles in the world. The old trees which stand to-day in the gardens of the palace of the Armenian Patriarch are believed to be the descendants of those trees which grew around the fountains and the canals in the pleasure-gardens of Herod. It was probably in this palace that Pilate and his wife Claudia were living when the Sanhedrin arrested our Lord.

Tradition says that Jesus was brought before Pilate in the prætorium of the Castle of Antonia, where the *Via Dolorosa* begins. And this is no doubt so. Pilate would have administered the Roman law in a judgment hall in the garrison buildings, although he and his wife were staying in the neighbouring palace.

When we read with care the four accounts of the Trial of Jesus, certain things are terribly clear and others are shadowy and uncertain. From a word here and a sentence there they challenge our intelligence and compel us to try to fit them together as the archæologist attempts to reconstruct the fragments of an inscription. One of the mysteries is the message which Claudia sent to Pilate early in the morning, begging her husband to save Jesus.

One must imagine that Pilate and his wife talked about Jesus on the night of the Agony in the Garden. Mr. Frank Morison has developed this theory with great plausibility in his remarkable book *Who Moved the Stone?* He believes that Caiaphas, the only man in Jerusalem who could have demanded a sudden interview with the Roman Governor, presented himself at the palace, acquainted Pilate with the intentions of the Sanhedrin, and asked him if he would be willing to try the case early in the morning in order that the execution might be effected before the Sabbath, which began at sunset on the day following.

‘Does anyone with personal knowledge of the immemorial characteristics of women suppose for a moment that an incident like this would pass without Claudia wanting to know something about it?’ asked Mr. Morison.

There is another reason, confirmed by one word in the Gospel of St. John, why Pilate and Claudia must have discussed Jesus on the night before the Crucifixion. In the Greek Testament the word used by St. John to describe the officer who came with the ‘band’ to arrest our Lord is *chiliarch*. Now, a *chiliarch* is the Greek equivalent to the *tribunus militum*, the commander of a cohort, and unless St. John uses the term in a general sense it means that Annas and Caiaphas were so afraid of the power of Christ, fearing

either that He might escape by miraculous means or that the crowds would defend Him, that they persuaded the commanding officer in Jerusalem to go in person with his men to the Mount of Olives. If that really did happen, it opens up an interesting train of thought.

The *chiliarch*, or tribune, of the cohort of the Twelfth Legion which garrisoned Jerusalem at that time was the only resident Roman of Pilate's class in the city. He was, in fact, Pilate's deputy. He must have been well known to both Pilate and Claudia. It is reasonable to suppose that he would have discussed the plot of the Sanhedrin with the Governor and his wife and would have told them not only of the Triumphal Entry and the Cleansing of the Temple, but many other things concerning the Man who 'went about doing good'.

It is useless but fascinating to speculate what effect this may have had on the mind of the woman who tried to save the life of Jesus. She may already have heard of Him. Stories from Galilee may have come to her ears, perhaps she had known some who believed in His Divinity. Perhaps she herself believed. But whatever occurred on that night in the palace of Herod, the attitude of Pilate on the day following, and the message which Claudia sent post-haste to the *prætorium*, cause us to think that in the lonely halls of Herod's palace Pilate and his wife talked together of Jesus of Nazareth. We do know that Claudia dreamed of Him and, awakening, found to her alarm that Pilate had already left for the *prætorium*. She called for a messenger and wrote: 'Have thou nothing to do with that just Man.'

And Pilate read it as he sat on the judgment seat.

## § 9

'Crucify Him!'

'Why?' asked Pilate. 'What evil hath He done? I have found no cause of death in Him.'

Pilate looked at the violent crowd below him, a crowd of

fanatics who would not enter the prætorium in case they would contract ceremonial defilement; and he loathed them. He had seen the same crowds before and had worked off his disgust by ordering his guards to charge. He hated their capacity for intrigue, their casuistry, their internal hatreds, their sectarian feuds, and their genius for shifting on to others the responsibility for their deeds, as they were now attempting to do.

He knew that Jesus Christ was innocent of the crime they had invented. He saw how subtly the priests had twisted it into a political offence. Our Lord's silence startled him.

'Answerest Thou nothing?' he had asked in amazement. 'Behold how many things they witness against Thee.'

'And He answered him to never a word; insomuch that the Governor marvelled greatly.' Who was this Man who could be so calm in the face of death?

Pilate, whose record was that of a stubborn, arrogant, and impatient tyrant, the man who had marched the legionary standards into Jerusalem, who had appropriated the Corban, who had trampled on the most tender susceptibilities of the people and had lashed crowds who came to beg for mercy, was now, St. John tells us, moved by a strange awe.

He stood on the steps of the prætorium, under the marble colonnade, and faced those who stood below; then, turning, he entered the judgment hall.

Jesus was standing beyond the portico, in the shade of the hall. A guard of the Twelfth Legion stood leaning on its spears. Jesus was robed in the rich mantle which Antipas had cast on Him in jest. Pilate saw it with a sense of frustration. Eagerly he had caught at the word 'Galilean' and had sent Him to Antipas in the belief that the Tetrarch of Galilee would have defended one of His own subjects against the wrath of the Judæans. But that ruse had failed. Jesus had been sent back from the Asmonæan Palace in the cast-off garment of a prince. The crafty Herod, 'that fox', was far too sly to involve himself in any charge of *majestas*. And Pilate's second attempt had also failed. He had offered to scourge Jesus and let Him go, but the mob had refused



the offer with shouts of rage. In the silence of the hall he asked:

‘Art Thou the King of the Jews?’

The formality of the trial, the attitude of judge to prisoner, had broken down. The awe and the curiosity which this silent Man created stirred uneasily in Pilate’s mind.

‘My kingdom is not of this world,’ said Christ to Pilate.

‘Art Thou a king, then?’ asked Pilate.

‘To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Everyone that is of the truth heareth My voice.’

Pilate looked into the eyes of Christ and expressed in three words the hunger of the pagan world:

‘What is truth?’

Then Pilate, turning, went towards the crowd in the sunlight beyond the portico. He stood there, a white figure, on the steps. When the shouting had died down, he said:

‘I find in Him no fault at all.’

The hatred of the crowd beat up against him like fire. He looked into faces twisted with rage. Then a third attempt to appease them came into his mind. It was his duty to release a Passover prisoner. He offered them the choice between Jesus of Nazareth and Barabbas, a zealot who had committed murder, never doubting that they would prefer Jesus.

‘But the chief priests moved the people that he should rather release Barabbas unto them.’

‘What will ye then that I shall do unto Him whom ye call the King of the Jews?’ asked Pilate.

It was an ironic request. Up to that moment he had no intention of taking the advice of the ugly crowd.

‘Crucify Him!’ they shouted.

Pilate turned away and gave orders for the scourging—‘the intermediate death’. The punishment was either delivered by lictors with thin elm rods, or by soldiers with the horrible *flagellum*, a short whip whose leather thongs were weighted with rough fragments of metal. Pilate had no lictors.

In a short while the waiting crowds saw two figures on the

steps beneath the portico. Christ stood there, a crown of thorns on His head and over His bleeding shoulders a red military cloak. Beside Him stood Pilate:

'Ecce homo . . . behold the Man,' said Pilate.

There was no contempt in his voice. They were the words of a weak but fair-minded man who hoped that the piteous spectacle of the scourged Christ would soften the savage hearts of His enemies. 'Ecce Homo!' The sight is one that has roused the pity and the love of the Christian world; but to the Jews who fought and screamed that morning in Jerusalem it meant nothing. The cries 'Crucify Him!' rose up louder than ever. The suffering Christ was led away into the darkness of the prætorium and Pilate faced the crowd alone:

'Take ye Him and crucify Him!' he cried, 'for I find no fault in Him!'

Once again he wasted his bitter irony on them. He knew how they were trying to burden him with the penalty of their hate, and he told them to do the impossible. Only he could crucify, and in those words he refused. Once again the awe which the silent, suffering Christ had awakened in his heart returned and, leaving the Jews shouting for the blood of Christ, he went again into the prætorium, and once again judge and Prisoner spoke together, and it was the judge who was frightened. Pilate looked into the suffering eyes beneath the crown of thorns:

'Whence art Thou?' he asked.

He seemed to be thinking: 'I know that this is no ordinary man. There is something about Him that I do not understand. He is outside my experience of men. It is my duty to save Him from the howling savages outside. Who is He? What is His mystery?'

'Whence art Thou?' he asked.

The only answer was a glance from the eyes of the Lonely Man:

'Speakest Thou not unto me?' pleaded Pilate. 'Knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify Thee, and—have power to release Thee?'

In the silence of the judgment hall, with the guard standing round, Jesus spoke to Pilate at last:

'Thou couldst have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered Me unto thee hath the greater sin.'

Pilate looked at Christ. He turned again to the portico and stood on the steps facing the Jews. 'Pilate sought to release Him,' says St. John. Then a new sound came from the crowd. No longer did they shriek 'Crucify Him!' They threatened Pilate.

'If thou let this Man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend!'

'Whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Cæsar!'

Then for the first time Pilate knew that the Jews had beaten him. He was not a great enough man to stand up against blackmail. Nearly a hundred years before, Cicero, defending Flaccus against a charge of injustice to the Jews, had been forced to lower his voice in the Forum in case the Jews rioted. 'You know how numerous these gentry are,' he had said, 'how they cling together and what pressure they can bring to bear in assemblies. I shall lower my voice when pleading, speaking just loud enough that the judges can hear me.'

Perhaps Pilate, when he was threatened with disloyalty to the Emperor, remembered the words of Cicero. Perhaps also he remembered Strabo's comment on the influence of the Alexandrian Jews in his time: 'These Jews,' said Strabo, 'have penetrated in every country, and it would be hard to find anywhere in the whole world a single place that has not had to put up with this race, and in which it did not obtain the mastery.'

Now a crowd, headed by the rulers and chief men of the Jewish nation, was threatening Pilate. It was no trivial taunt. Pilate did not under-estimate the underground influence of the Jews, and there was probably much in his record that he wished to hide. His resistance collapsed, broken down by self-interest and fear.

He ascended the judgment seat, which was set on the pavement.

'Behold your King!' he said.

Jesus stood before them with blood on His brow and the stripes of the *flagellum* staining His body.

'Shall I crucify your King?' asked Pilate.

It was his last futile plea. The sight of Jesus must have wrung it from him.

'We have no king but Cæsar!' came the hypocritical cry from Annas and Caiaphas and the chief men. They had twisted a charge of blasphemy into one of politics and, having failed to win their point, they had probed round to the self-interest of the judge and had turned events so that the judge now stood in the dock with the Prisoner.

Pilate stands condemned before history for his weakness. He could have saved Jesus. But the accusers were too cunning for him and he gave way. He called for a bowl of water and, before them all, he washed his hands so that his action could be seen even if his words were not heard in the tumult of the crowd:

'I am innocent of the blood of this just Person: see ye to it.'

'Then answered all the people and said, His blood be on us and on our children.'

Pilate solemnly pronounced the horrible words:

'Ibis ad crucem.'

'Then the soldiers of the Governor took Jesus into the common hall.'

## § 10

The *Via Dolorosa* was mercifully short—scarcely a thousand paces. It lay from the Prætorium to the Gate Genath. Outside this gate, and a few yards from the city wall beside the main road into Jerusalem from the north, stood a place called Golgotha, the Place of a Skull. There is nothing in any of the four Gospels to suggest that Golgotha was a hill, but it has been assumed that it must have been so. The first person to call it a hill was the Bordeaux Pilgrim, who visited Jerusalem in A.D. 333, when the Church of the

Holy Sepulchre was being built. He mentioned 'the little hill of Golgotha (*monticulus Golgotha*) where the Lord was crucified'.

For hundreds of years after Latin writers continued to refer to Golgotha as 'the rock of the cross' or 'the rock of Golgotha', and it was not until the sixth century that again the idea of elevation was associated with it, and we read of 'Mount Calvary'. By this time, of course, the original elevation had long been disguised by architects.

Those who thronged the streets near the Prætorium would have seen the terrible, but familiar, procession of death. A centurion in charge of a half maniple of the Twelfth Legion came first, riding on horseback and clearing a path through the narrow streets. Behind him walked a legionary bearing a notice board on a pole. Written in red on a background of white gypsum was a brief account of the crimes committed by those about to die.

Jesus followed, bearing His cross-beam, clothed no longer in the scarlet gown of the mockery, but as St. Matthew tells us, in His own raiment. There is an old tradition that He wore a black robe girded at the waist with a leather belt and that under it was the rich vestment given to Him in derision by Herod. He did not wear the crown of thorns, which was carried by one of the executioners in order that He might be crowned again on the cross. Worn out with suffering and with emotion, our Lord was unable to keep pace with the procession, and it seems that in the pressing into service of Simon, the Cyrenian, we may detect a touch of kindness on the part of the centurion, Longinus, who was soon to testify to the Divinity of his Prisoner and to embrace the Christian faith.

The two thieves followed, bearing the cross-beams; and behind them, marching six to the rank, came the remainder of the half maniple, spear on shoulder. The Sanhedrists, who wished no doubt to enjoy their triumph, followed at the end of the procession, but, when they came to the Gate Genath, kicked their white mules into a canter and went on ahead to Golgotha.

In the sunlight of a spring morning, when the swifts were flying above the walls of Jerusalem as they do to this day in the month of Nisan, three crosses were set up outside the city gate. Those who were 'looking on afar off' covered their eyes and stood with breaking hearts. And the hours wore on. The soldiers beneath the Cross shook dice in a helmet for the seamless coat. They lay down on Golgotha in the heat of the day to eat bread and cheese and to drink their sour wine. They heard the Divine words of compassion break from the lips of the Lonely Man:

'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.'

At three o'clock in the afternoon the Sanhedrists went to Pilate to demand the *crurifragium* in order that the bodies might not hang on the cross until the evening, which also was—how little they knew it—the beginning of a new day. And the soldiers hastened the death of the two thieves, 'but when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs.'

. . . . .

The night before I left Jerusalem I went out into the streets of the old city. It was a lovely night and the moon was rising. Behind the Damascus Gate a flight of steps goes up to the city wall. Mounting the ramparts, I walked in the direction of Herod's Gate along the narrow path made for the bowmen of the Middle Ages.

The moon rose, steeping the city in a fall of green light. A breathless silence lay over Jerusalem. Each dome, tower and minaret was clearly etched against the sky; each tree stood in its own small pool of moonlight. Sometimes the sentry walk descended by steps to a lower level and mounted again; sometimes I entered guard houses set at intervals on the wall, small stone chambers through whose bow-slits I saw a narrow vision of the moonlit roads beyond the city. Crossing Herod's Gate, I came at length to the corner tower and, turning to the south, walked along the east wall that overlooks the Mount of Olives.

The moon hung above the Mount, touching the ridge with a gold haze, washing every white track in light, painting each olive tree in shadow against the rock. How hushed it was in the light of the moon. Not a footstep rang in the streets below me; no one moved in the silence beyond the wall. Above the black shadow of the Kedron Valley I could see the moonlight silvering the trees in the Garden of Gethsemane. . . .

Upon the third day, early in the morning, Mary Magdalene hastened to the Tomb, and when she saw that it was empty sorrow filled her heart, so that, St. John tells us, she wept. As she turned to go, Someone stood before her, and she heard a Voice asking:

‘Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?’

‘Sir, if thou have borne him hence,’ she begged, ‘tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.’

‘Mary.’

‘Master!’

Jesus instantly exhibited the strange difference that is noticeable in all his subsequent contact with the Apostles:

‘Touch me not,’ He said gently, ‘for I am not yet ascended to my Father.’

One imagines that Mary in her joy had flung herself at the feet of Christ and had tried to touch Him.

‘Go to my brethren,’ He commanded, ‘and say unto them I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God and your God.’

In the greyness of the morning the woman ran back with the message that Christ had Risen.





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